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Game of love and death

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**ACPL ITEM
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ANNEX

ANNEX

THE GAME OF
LOVE AND DEATH



By ROMAIN ROLLAND

CLERAMBAULT

COLAS BREUGNON, BURGUNDIAN

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE

I. DAWN

II. IN PARIS

III. JOURNEY'S END

PIERRE AND LUCE

SOME MUSICIANS OF FORMER DAYS

THE PEOPLE'S THEATRE

THE SOUL ENCHANTED

I. ANNETTE AND SYLVIE

II. SUMMER

THE GAME OF LOVE AND DEATH

BY
ROMAIN ROLLAND

Translated from the French
by
ELEANOR STIMSON BROOKS



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TO THAT FAITHFUL SPIRIT
WHO POSSESSES THE PATRIOTISM OF EUROPE
AND THE RELIGION OF FRIENDSHIP

STEFAN ZWEIG

I DEDICATE IN ALL AFFECTION
THIS DRAMA
WHICH OWES ITS WRITING TO HIM

R. R.

AUGUST, 1924

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PREFACE

"The Game of Love and Death" is a panel from my Polyptych of the Revolution.

More than twenty-five years have passed since I conceived and sketched out the general scheme of this dramatic cycle. Circumstances obliged me to interrupt it. But I have never abandoned it.

In 1900, while I was following the rehearsals of "Danton" at the Escholiers and composing "The Fourteenth of July," I wrote:

"The further I penetrate into this world of suffering and superhuman force, the more I feel that it constitutes a vast poetic drama; I hear the roar of the rising sea, the Iliad of the people of France. Never has the door of conscience been more violently wrenched from its hinges. Never has one been able to bend further over the abyss of the soul. Never have the invisible gods and the monsters that inhabit the caverns of the spirit emerged more distinctly out of the night than at this hour, superb and terrible as thunder. It is not only the heroic drama of a past epoch that I wish to describe, but

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the great test of the powers and limitations of life."

Following my methods of work, I allowed the idea to mature. Before constructing the cycle, I waited for it to organize itself in all its parts. This has now virtually taken place. It has ripened slowly, while I was laboring in other fields, "Jean-Christophe," "Colas Breugnon," and beginning "The Soul Enchanted." Shall I have the time to cut and store my grain before the end of the day? I do not know; but that is of no importance. To every hour its pleasure and its pain!

I must not unfold here prematurely the series of projected works which in my imagination form a dramatic "geste" of the Revolution. Everyone who has any experience of artistic creation knows that he must never husk the young fruit before it has reached its maturity. The work stripped naked by its lord and master, like the wife of King Candale, ceases to belong to him. Time to place it before other eyes when it is finished!

I only wish to say that this Polyptych in twelve panels, which allows a place for satirical comedy near the drama, and reserves for the pastoral its nest in the tumultuous forest, is intended to be the symphonic tableau of a cyclone of the people. First, one sees the social tempest gathering in the

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distance, in the Fragonard sky of Ermenonville, during the last days of the Vision-haunted Precursor. It comes up with a rush, it throws down the walls, in a springtide happiness of the Ode to Joy ("The Fourteenth of July"). It awakens the demons that sleep in the depths of the human heart; and its forces of destruction, unchained by the "Apprentice-Sorcerer," pass beyond the control of the will. It crushes and hurls Pelion upon Ossa, Girondins, Cordeliers, Jacobins, Danton and Robespierre, the giants struck by lightning ("The Wolves," "The Triumph of Reason," "Danton," to be completed in a "Robespierre"). And after having destroyed the past and the destroyers, it disappears at full speed over fields enveloped in flames and smoke. The red cloud vanishes far away from the renovated world, while in the Epilogue, at the close of the Revolution, a handful of exiles of imperial France, royalists, regicides, reconciled enemies, in a Swiss valley, on the other slope of the Juras, the gate of the fatherland, enjoy the peace that has returned to their agitated hearts and the eternal silence of heaven which belongs to all.

If, in these latter days, in spite of new tasks, I have been brought back to this interrupted work, it has been because of the encouragement of my friends abroad. The hurricane

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that passed over France in 1793 and left behind it a fiery track, which is dying away, has continued its path towards the East; it has hovered over the plains of Germany and Russia; the flight of genii emerging from the eagle's nest of the Occident is tormenting the souls of other peoples, while our own, assuaged, is sleeping off the heady draught of wine. The passions of the men of our Convention, moderated in our blood, are burning in the blood over there. Berlin and Moscow have experienced them. The productions of "Danton" at the Circus Theatre of Max Reinhardt, on the morrow of the Revolutionary battles in Berlin, had a profound effect on the public, for they seemed an echo, under the vaults of history, of the combats of the day. And "The Wolves" has aroused in the souls of Germany, Czechoslovakia, Russia, and even, during the last months, Tokio, ravaged by the earthquake, the tragic problem, present again in people's minds, of the conflict of the individual conscience with the safety of the State — the *salus publica* facing the *salus aeterna*. That good European, Stefan Zweig, who for fifteen years has been my most faithful friend and my best counsellor, has incessantly recalled to me, as one of my first duties as a writer, my task as a quarryman cutting the

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sanguinary mountain of the Revolution. So I am once more thrusting my pickaxe into the rock; and here is the first block which, this spring, I have detached. I have inscribed it with Zweig's name. But for him, the block would have continued to sleep in the earth.

Everyone who is familiar with the French Revolution will recognize, at the first glance, the real men and events that have served as the theme of my tragic "Game." The *Memoirs of Louvet* have provided me with the extraordinary adventure of this proscript, hunted, rejected by all his friends, who, knowing that he is lost, returns from the Gironde into the jaws of death in Paris, carrying across the whole of France a head with a price on it so that before it falls it may kiss the mouth of the beloved.

In the features of the latter, one finds the veiled figure of Sophie de Condorcet, the melancholy grace of the friend of Cabanis. The name and character of Jérôme de Courvoisier evoke the double martyrdom of the last of the Encyclopaedists and the genial Lavoisier; but the dominant note here rests with the man with the brow of a conqueror and the mouth of the vanquished, Condorcet, who, hiding in his attic near the Luxembourg, with death in his heart but a light in his eyes,

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wrote, before taking poison, his "Credo" and "The Progress of the Human Spirit," ending with the cry of faith: "Science will conquer death." D'Alembert called him "the volcano under the snow." After the terrible winter of 1793, the snow has hardly begun to melt, under the March sun, when the action of the drama opens. But the fire is slumbering in all the frozen hearts; and D'Alembert's phrase might describe them all. I might have used it as a title for my "Game."

I must ask the historians to forgive me for the liberties I have taken with my heroes (and they are large enough in the account given by Courvoisier of the sitting of the Convention). More than once already, in my *Plays for the People*, in the prefaces to the *Plays of the Revolution*, and quite recently in that of the American edition of *La Montespan*, I have explained my artistic conception of history. For me it is a reservoir of the passions and the forces of nature. I borrow from it. I seize from the bottom of the pit the great wild human animals, the many-headed beast: the People, and their leaders. I am not concerned to obtain a perfect resemblance; for they are eternal. I remember the lofty lesson given by Michael Angelo when he sculptured — not Lorenzo — but Il

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Penseroso: "In a hundred years it will look like him!"

The business of a poet is to sing, if he can, the Cantata "*für alle Zeit*." The artistic power of the drama of history is less in what it has been than in what it is always. The cyclone of '93 still resounds in the world. We hear the crackling in the neighboring woods. We ourselves, during the Dreyfus Affair, rubbed our skins against the *Wolves*. At a performance at Lunet's People's Theatre in Paris (at which Jaurès spoke) I heard the proletarian audience ingenuously striving to identify in Danton, Robespierre, Vadier, etc., Jaurès, Guesde and others whom I do not wish to name; and naturally they succeeded. Since then, our demigods and our minotaurs have had the most striking reincarnations in Russia. They are the eternally "reborn," these human elements, unceasingly reappearing under the thousand and one veils of Proteus, which for me form the value and the attraction of history. More than the individuals of a day, whose faces have been devoured by the earth of the grave, they are the Forces who have chosen their dwelling in these bodies and, since then, have taken up their abode in others.

But I also wish to preserve on my canvasses the special light of this vanished day: for

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every day has its own light. And I have tried to write these dramas of the Revolution in the color of the style that clothed these passions. I do not conceal from myself the dangers of this antiquated form, which runs the risk of being felt falsely by the interpreters and a part of the public. The boiling rhetoric of Jean-Jacques, canalized through Robespierre, or passing through the mill-race, foaming, torrential, charged with waste, and pouring out through Danton, the Shakespearian Mannekenpis, demands that the reader and the actor should know how to unswathe its rounded magniloquence and reach the rigid or convulsed souls beneath its swelling periods. This oratorical language lends itself to more than one misconception, to which foreign interpreters, even more than those of France, are liable; for the former have not inherited the instinctive tradition of our modes of feeling. For that matter, even among ourselves more than one has been deceived by it. The intelligence of a Taine could not — perhaps because it did not wish to do so — perceive beneath the academic bombast of words and cadences, or through the smoke of these battles of words, the devouring passions, the terrible sincerity of the rhetoricians of the Convention, who carried an axe in one hand and their heads in

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the other. To understand this music, one must hear vibrating in each of its chords the harmonic sequence of hatred, love, death. Grasp its hand! The palm is feverish.

If, therefore, I have called this tragedy a Game, it is that of "I stake everything!"

"My kingdom for a horse!" cried Richard the hunchback tyrant in the battle . . . The storm-cloud is overhead . . . My life for a lightning-stroke of illumination! I lose it. I have won.

ROMAIN ROLLAND

August, 1924

THE GAME OF LOVE
AND DEATH

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JÉRÔME DE COURVOISIER, Member of the Convention,
60 years old.

SOPHIE DE COURVOISIER, His Wife, 35 years old.

CLAUDE VALLÉE, Proscribed Girondin Deputy, 30 years
old.

LAZARE CARNOT, of the Committee of Public Safety,
41 years old.

DENIS BAYOT, 65 years old.

HORACE BOUCHET, 25 years old.

LODOÏSKA CERIZIER, 25 years old.

CHLORIS SOUCY, 17 years old.

CRAPART, Delegate of the Committee of Security.

TIMOLÉON, DOUCIN, PEAU D'ANE, Executors of Search-
warrants.

The action takes place in Paris, at Courvoisier's
house, towards the end of March, 1794.

A Louis XVI salon, with great windowed bays, situated
on the ground floor, three steps above the garden.

In the middle of the wall at the rear, a glass door is
wide open, giving access to the garden by the three steps.
The little garden is glistening with sunlight. Just in the
centre of the open door one sees a beautiful lavender lilac
in flower, and at the bottom of the garden the wall separat-
ing it from the street. This wall is not very high: a child,
climbing up on the post in the corner at the right, might
look over the top into the street. Above the wall, the
evening sky reddens and slowly fades out.

WITHIN THE SALON:

At the left: two doors, one near the footlights, the other near the garden. When the latter is open, one catches a glimpse of the corner of the room beyond, a bedroom. Between the two doors, in the middle of the wall at the left, a tall marble fireplace. Above it, a bust of Voltaire. Behind it, a large mirror. On the left of the fireplace, a Louis XVI desk. To the left of the desk, between the desk and the door near the footlights, is arranged a little island of low chairs for private conversation. The projection of the fireplace, the desk and a Chinese screen shelter it from the sight of the garden.

At the right: a door facing that on the left wall which is near the garden. When it is open, one sees the railing of a circular staircase, a corner of the landing, the first steps descending to the street. Facing the marble fireplace, a window opens on the street. To the right and left of this window, two large eighteenth-century portraits representing the master and the mistress of the house. The latter at the age of twenty, in a mythological and pastoral allegory, the former *à la Diderot*, in indoor costume, the neck bare, a fichu about the head, at work, turning towards an absent listener. They seem to form a friendly group with the bust of Voltaire, who smiles from the opposite fireplace. A large harpsichord, below the portrait of Madame de Courvoisier (the nearer of the two portraits to the footlights), forms another shelter for private conversation.

The general impression is that of a refined atmosphere, of people of fashion, accustomed to luxury, with visible traces of embarrassment, disorder and dilapidation. The monumental fireplace is empty; towards the end, a poor little fire is to burn there. The desk and the table are covered with papers, with coffee-cups scattered among them. There are no candles in the chandelier. A single taper will serve throughout to light the scene.

SCENE I

(At the rising of the curtain, a small company — two young women (SOPHIE DE COURVOISIER and LODOÏSKA CERIZIER), a young girl (CHLORIS SOUCY), a young officer (HORACE BOUCHET), and an old man (DENIS BAYOT) — holding one another's hands, dance about the blossoming lilac, while they sing Grétry's Ronde Nationale, « L'innocence est de retour ».)

DENIS BAYOT

(Breathless, trying to extricate himself from the dance.)

Have mercy on me, young people!

CHLORIS, LODOÏSKA, HORACE

No, no, one round more!

(The old man, who has disengaged one of his hands but is still held by the other, returns to the room, dragging behind him the little troop, who continue to sing. He falls into an armchair; and while he pants, laughing, the three young people, gathering about him, break into another ironical ronde, on Grétry's air, « Pour la plantation de l'arbre de la

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liberté ». Chloris, as she sings, places on the old man's head a lilac branch, bent so as to form a crown.)

CHLORIS, LODOÏSKA, HORACE

(Singing)

« A son doux aspect renaissiez,

Vous que la vieillesse a glacés . . .

De ces festons voyez vos fils

Ceindre en riant vos fronts blanchis . . . »

SOPHIE

My old friend, I shall save you. Come, young madcaps, allow us to get our breath! Hop, skip, dance and dance again! We are out of it, we old souls . . .

DENIS

I protest! Age belongs to me alone.

SOPHIE

Egoist!

HORACE, LODOÏSKA

We all protest! That is a joke!

SOPHIE

I have already passed the middle of the road. (*To Denis Bayot.*) You protest in vain. I am on your side.

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DENIS BAYOT

What good fortune! I shan't say another word.

LODOÏSKA

But we are not going to allow ourselves to be dispossessed. You belong to us.

SOPHIE

(*Showing a lock of white hair on her temple*)

Behold these white hairs!

LODOÏSKA

A fine proof! Everyone would discover just as many if he looked closely.

HORACE

I have some, for one.

LODOÏSKA

So have I.

CHLORIS

So have I.

ALL

(*Laughing*)

No?

CHLORIS

Upon my word I have. (*She shows one.*)

SOPHIE

It's blonde.

CHLORIS

It's white.

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HORACE

Who wouldn't have them, after all we've had to endure these last five months?

LODOÏSKA

Five months! Call it twice that!

CHLORIS

Call it three times!

HORACE

No, let's only speak of this winter! The rest . . .

DENIS

Yes, it's better to be silent.

CHLORIS

Ah! All that people have suffered!

LODOÏSKA

No fire for weeks!

DENIS

No wood, no bread!

CHLORIS

Oh! For my part, I've been so cold that in the morning I haven't had the courage to get out of bed.

LODOÏSKA

And I froze in mine. It's too big now!

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HORACE

(With a significant glance)

It mustn't be left so.

DENIS

Once I spent sixteen hours on the Quai de Bercy, from seven in the evening till eleven in the morning, waiting in the cold wind for the distribution of a bag of wood and a measure of flour, which I had to carry in a wheelbarrow on the ice. I fell twice.

SOPHIE

Which do you like better, hunger or cold?

LODOÏSKA and CHLORIS

Oh, cold's the worst!

HORACE

No, hunger.

LODOÏSKA, CHLORIS, SOPHIE

Cold, cold, cold!

HORACE

Hunger, hunger, hunger!

LODOÏSKA

Glutton!

CHLORIS

Oh, I would a thousand times rather have nothing to eat — ever — and be able just to warm my feet for five minutes.

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LODOÏSKA

It's simply made me weep! (*Horace laughs.*) You laugh, barbarian! . . . Oh, you, you don't know!

HORACE

In the army of the Moselle, I have slept on the snow . . . It's true that we had a little hut to burn to keep ourselves warm.

DENIS

What about the people inside?

HORACE

We didn't look very closely!

CHLORIS

As for me, when I used to be so cold, I should have been glad, yes, yes, glad to be burned!

LODOÏSKA

And to think they can call a place where you are warm, Hell!

HORACE

What I call Hell is attacking the enemy on an empty stomach.

LODOÏSKA, CHLORIS

No, cold is Hell!

HORACE

No, hunger!

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SOPHIE

We have tried them both. Come, no jealousy!

CHLORIS

Heavens! How long it's been! This winter, this winter that would never end!

SOPHIE

It's all over now. Let's talk no more about it. Let's enjoy the good sun!

DENIS

The first fine day of the young season . . . Our delightful friend! What a pleasant idea to invite us to a party in your garden!

LODOÏSKA

To celebrate the spring, which has come back in your blossoming lilac!

SOPHIE

Can I keep it for myself? In these times of want, everyone should share with his friends whatever scraps of happiness he has.

LODOÏSKA

Yes, happiness is becoming rare!

DENIS

Happiness? It has become a foreign word for us.

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CHLORIS

How long it has been since one has laughed!
Oh, my God! (*She bursts into tears.*)

SOPHIE

My dear, my dear, what is the matter?

CHLORIS

Has one the right to laugh?

DENIS

Yes, we've suffered too much.

SOPHIE

(*To Chloris*)

Indeed I should say one has the right! My
dear, it's a duty!

CHLORIS

All those we have lost!

LODOÏSKA

Mine.

CHLORIS

Mine.

DENIS

Mine.

SOPHIE

Hush! Hush!

HORACE

(*To Lodoïska*)

And those one is going to lose — aren't
you thinking about them?

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LODOÏSKA

What I have I keep. I shouldn't bear to lose them. No, not that!

HORACE

Then let's think no more of others. And dance!!

HORACE

(*To Chloris*)

You too, little friend.

(*Chloris hesitates and looks at Sophie.*)

SOPHIE

Go, my child.

HORACE

Come, let's begin the ronde again!

(*The three young people go out into the garden and begin to sing the ronde again. Denis and Sophie remain in the salon, seated at the left, between the desk and the inner door, near the footlights.*)

DENIS

Everyone thinks of his bereavements. This one of her fiancé, that one of her husband, and I of my son dead . . . But life is stronger.

SOPHIE

Even in you, my old friend?

(*During all this opening of the act, Sophie re-*

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tains an affectionate smiling calm, which distinguishes her from the agitation of the others.)

DENIS

Even in me. I am ashamed.

SOPHIE

You are not the only one. Listen!
(From the other side of the garden wall singing voices, a violin, a flute, a tambourine, cries of joy are heard passing in the street.)

DENIS

Yes, in that singing crowd that is passing there is not one who has not had his share of trials, his portion of sacrifice, his victims of the war or the Revolution, not one for whom tomorrow is not as heavy with anxieties and torments as yesterday.

SOPHIE

That's why they sing. So they won't have to think of it any longer.

DENIS

They think of it in spite of everything. Look!

(The ronde is interrupted in the garden.)

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HORACE

What are they calling out there? Listen!
*(They stop talking to listen to the voice of a
news vendor outside.)*

HORACE

(Repeating)

"The Courier of Equality . . . Great
battle at . . . The enemy at . . ." *(He
runs to the wall, climbs up the post and, with
his arms over the top, hails the newsboy.)*
Psst! Citizen! Thank you! *(He comes back
with the sheet. The two young women crowd
about him to read it.)*

HORACE

The cohorts of the kings are reforming
from the Meuse to the Rhine. The Republic
is going to reply by an immense effort. The
spring sun relights the furnace. I shall have
to go back.

· LODOÏSKA

No, no! I won't have it!

DENIS

Who are we to say "I will" or "I won't"?

HORACE

Yes, the nation wills it.

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CHLORIS

The nation? Do you mean those terrible men?

LODOÏSKA

Yes, the Grand Committee.

(Sophie places a finger on her mouth. They all lower their heads.)

HORACE

It is right.

DENIS

(Coughing)

It is the strongest.

CHLORIS

It's like an ogre. It will devour us all.

LODOÏSKA

(Covering her mouth with her hand and addressing Horace.)

But at least not right away! Horace, you won't leave at once?

HORACE

No, I think not, unless there is an unexpected order.

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LODOÏSKA

(All, with the exception of Sophie, feel an abnormal, somewhat feverish excitement.)

How much time still.

HORACE

A month, perhaps.

LODOÏSKA

Oh, well, a month . . . Eternity . . .

DENIS

Fortunate youth! What wouldn't one endure for a month of happiness!

CHLORIS

I am young, too! But I am not happy. I haven't been happy . . . Oh, I shouldn't ask even for a month . . . Just one day, one day of happiness!

SOPHIE

Peace, dear. You shall have it and many more after it. Life is long for you.

CHLORIS

No, no, life is short.

SOPHIE

I am twice your age.

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CHLORIS

Oh, in your day! . . . Forgive me! . . .
But nowadays it isn't the same thing. Who
is sure of tomorrow?

LODOÏSKA

I am sure of tomorrow, for one. (*She looks
at Horace.*)

HORACE

(*Close to her, taking her hand, in a low voice*)

Tonight.

(*Chloris, who has caught the word, looks at
them with bitterness in her eyes.*)

LODOÏSKA

(*She has observed it, and smilingly goes over to
Chloris, who is sitting on Sophie's knees, and
tries to caress her.*)

My pretty!

CHLORIS

(*Angrily disengaging herself*)

No, don't touch me! (*She runs into the
garden.*)

LODOÏSKA

What's the matter with her?

SOPHIE

(*With a shade of friendly reproach*)

You know very well.

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HORACE

She envies us.

DENIS

She is not the only one.

SOPHIE

(Smiling at Denis and Horace)

Go and console her! *(To Lodoïska.)* No, not you, egoist, you stay here!

(Denis and Horace go out. Sophie and Lodoïska remain alone. The latter, laughing, happy, throws herself down at the knees of Sophie, who is seated, and encircles them with her arms.)

LODOÏSKA

Yes, I am an egoist, egoist, egoist! I shouldn't want not to be, when it is so good to be one! Scold me! Scold me!

SOPHIE

(Smiling)

That wouldn't do any good.

LODOÏSKA

Oh, yes! . . . It would add to the pleasure . . . No, don't wish me not to be! I have suffered so, so much! . . . My husband, my Hector, snatched from my arms by the enemy Death! . . . Ah, how I have wept!

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SOPHIE

When was it you lost him?

LODOÏSKA

(*Simply*)

Six . . . No, five months ago . . . Yes, it was in October. I didn't want to live any more. Everything was over for me. And now! Everything is beginning. (*Correcting herself.*) Everything is rebeginning. Poor Hector! . . . Dear Horace! . . .

SOPHIE

All the ancient heroes.

LODOÏSKA

Will you keep still! . . . It seems to me just the same . . . I forbid you to make fun of me.

SOPHIE

I am not making fun of you.

LODOÏSKA

I am quite sure that my Hector would rejoice with me. Are you smiling?

SOPHIE

So are you.

LODOÏSKA

No . . . Yes . . . Ah, my good and beautiful friend, how we love to lie to our-

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selves! I have so much need of rejoicing that I should like to have him rejoice too. I know very well that he no longer feels anything. But I, I who feel, am I wrong, tell me, am I doing him a wrong, because I want to rejoice just for this little time that I have to live? Do you think he would be angry with me? No, no, he ought to be happy over what makes me happy. Isn't that so? Since he loved me! And then. Since he is dead! . . . Poor Hector! . . . Ah, it is good to live, to live!

SOPHIE

There is living and living. To live, for you, is to love.

LODOÏSKA

(In the affectionate dialogue of the two women, there is a touch of irony on Lodoïska's side, while she is admiring Sophie's wisdom, and on Sophie's side a touch of smiling impatience as she accepts her praise.)

There is nothing in life but loving . . . You are still smiling . . . My wise friend, yes, you, you are above our weaknesses. You have a beautiful life, all clear, all of a piece. You have been able to keep it sheltered from the storms of society and the troubles of the

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heart. You are a privileged being. You are happy in a cloudless marriage which the follies of passion have never stained — serene, almost filial — with a man wise like yourself, famous, respectable, to whom from childhood you have been attached by bonds of tender reverence. An unchangeable sky. Ah, how I marvel at it!

SOPHIE

(Smiling)

But you would not have it in exchange for one of your clouds.

LODOÏSKA

For my Horace? No, no! I would not exchange him. Each has his own fate! But yours is the most beautiful.

SOPHIE

It is like those beautiful women whom everyone admires. But they love the others.

LODOÏSKA

Do keep still! Everyone would like to be you. But you are the only one who could be.

SOPHIE

(Smiling)

Exactly what I have just said!

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LODOÏSKA

(Who has not been listening)

The friend, the confidante, even the Egeria of the great man who was the friend of Voltaire, and who is the friend of Carnot . . .

DENIS

(Who has just come in and hears the last reply)

. . . who was the counsellor of the Encyclopædia, and who today is a member of the Grand Committee. Yes, this is the unique privilege of a universal spirit . . . Man of science, philanthropist, philosopher, member of the Academy and the Convention . . . A glory established two reigns ago, which survives firmly the downfall of kings, watches the regimes as they pass and imposes itself upon them all, maintains itself inviolate, amid the furious parties that rend one another.

SOPHIE

My friends, you do not know upon what fragile foundations this security rests.

DENIS

We know in any case that it is not selfish. How many times the credit of Jérôme de

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Courvoisier has been employed for us, sometimes to assuage a part of our misery, sometimes, in critical hours, covering menaced friends with its protection!

LODOÏSKA

And we know too to whom we owe this protection. To his wise consort.

DENIS

Sophie, the well-named.

LODOÏSKA

The fairy Tranquillity.

DENIS

She who can do anything with him.

LODOÏSKA

We have made use of her!

DENIS

How could we help making use of her! Jérôme de Courvoisier has remained, in these mad times, the only one who still exercises the role of moderator among the masters of life and death.

SOPHIE

Alas! This role is weak, and every day it becomes more so.

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LODOÏSKA

(With a touch of envy)

Whatever happens, at least you are safe.
Nothing can reach you.

CHLORIS

(Entering with Horace. She has completely forgotten her chagrin of a moment before.)

Oh, the poor things! The poor things!

SOPHIE

What is it?

CHLORIS

Something we have just learned. *(She hands a newspaper to Sophie.)*

SOPHIE

Another of those dreadful sheets. No.
One shouldn't read them any more.

LODOÏSKA

Madame Tranquillity, we haven't all, like you, the sense not to read them. We know it hurts us. That is why we do it.
(She has taken the paper)

CHLORIS

No, listen! It's too horrible! Pétion, Buzot, Vallée . . .

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SOPHIE

(In anguish, but with a restrained voice)

Vallée! . . .

(She has risen from her chair. None of the others has noticed her movement or her cry. They are grouped about Lodoïska, who is holding the paper.)

CHLORIS

In the neighborhood of Bordeaux, they have just discovered them, dead, half-eaten by the wolves . . .

(In the general agitation, no one notices that of Sophie, who has fallen back in her chair, without a motion, without a word. She covers her face with both hands and does not stir again.)

HORACE

(Resuming the reading, with Lodoïska, Chloris and Denis, who bend eagerly over the paper with him.)

For months they were hunted. The dogs, after catching the trail, were led to a cave in an abandoned quarry. They recognized Pétion, with his stomach open, his entrails coming out . . .

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DENIS

The old king of Paris, our mayor, the adored president of the Assembly . . .

LODOÏSKA

(Reading)

The other . . . The face eaten . . . Oh!
. . . *(She hands the paper to the others.)*

HORACE

(Continuing)

. . . The nose, the lips torn off . . .
They were in doubt . . . They thought it was Buzot . . . But from the papers on the body they found it was Vallée.

CHLORIS

Poor things!

DENIS

Don't bewail them too much! They found a way of escaping the guillotine which their friends Barbaroux and Guadet mounted last week.

LODOÏSKA

Yes . . . But what they must have suffered first!

HORACE

It's all the same afterwards.

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DENIS

It should have ended in that way . . .
That mad revolt . . .

CHLORIS

And yet you used to approve of them.

DENIS

Never!

CHLORIS

I have heard you say . . .

DENIS

Never!

CHLORIS

You admired them all.

LODOÏSKA

Silence, little girl!

(A brief pause)

DENIS

(Coughing)

They deceived everybody. People thought they were stronger. Why revolt when you are the weaker?

(A silence. Sophie has uncovered her face and remains motionless in her chair, looking straight ahead of her, holding in her emotions, with a mechanical, frozen smile.)

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CHLORIS

Poor little Vallée! He wasn't thirty years old!

LODOÏSKA

I danced with him in the spring of last year . . . He was one of your friends too, Sophie . . .

(Sophie neither answers nor stirs. Lodoïska, too excited to notice it, goes on.)

LODOÏSKA

Such a charming dancer!

CHLORIS

And how well he recited Monsieur Florian's verses!

LODOÏSKA

He was brave, too. I saw him at the head of his battalion of Allies, marching along with his hair streaming in the wind, after the assault on the Château des Tuileries.

CHLORIS

It was a holiday to go and hear him speak in the tribune of the Assembly.

HORACE

He was sarcastic and violent. There was a cruel malice in those words of his that made

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Robespierre blink with rage behind his spectacles. When he apostrophized one of his enemies, the tribunes and the Chamber roared with laughter and shouted under the discharge.

LODOÏSKA

For my part, I looked at his lips.

HORACE

Lodoïska, I am jealous.

DENIS

Jealous? Of lips that have been torn away?

LODOÏSKA

Ah, the horror of it! . . . But why, why did he go and burn himself in the fire of politics?

HORACE

One has one's ambitions.

LODOÏSKA

Isn't it better to love?

HORACE

One wants to save the country.

LODOÏSKA

I want you to save me first! . . . One must save what one loves.

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DENIS

First, one must save oneself. (*The others cry out in protest.*) Yes, you cry out! . . . You will see, young people, when you are my age! Ambition and love are all very fine, but they go. What remains to the end is oneself. And to save that is a sacred duty!

HORACE

Yes, to succeed in living has become a difficult art in our day. The rest of us will not have the time to learn it.

CHLORIS

But I want to, I want to! (*To Denis.*) You must teach me the secret.

DENIS

It's to be indifferent. One has to choose, child, between letting others die and dying oneself.

CHLORIS

I don't want to die!
(*The little group — Chloris, Denis, Horace — has withdrawn, talking and laughing — already. Lodoïska alone remains with Sophie. The two women are in a corner of the salon, sheltered from the sight of the garden, between the desk and the footlights.*)

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LODOÏSKA

Sophie, the silent, you let us talk, talk, excite ourselves. And you remain there, the benevolent spectator, a little outside it all, motionless, as if you were leaning on your balcony, watching our emotions from a distance, with your beautiful gray eyes and your mute smile. How calm, how calm you are!

SOPHIE

(Without stirring, without raising her voice)

Yes, the calm, the calm of a bottomless sorrow.

LODOÏSKA

(Astonished)

Sophie!

(Silence.)

What are you saying?

(Silence.)

What have you said?

(Sophie does not reply, does not make any movement, but Lodoïska, who is leaning over to study her face, suddenly springs towards her.)

LODOÏSKA

My friend, you are weeping!

(Sophie puts her hand over Lodoïska's mouth to make her keep silent. A pause. Sophie

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looks for her handkerchief to brush away her tears. Lodoïska takes her own and tenderly wipes Sophie's eyes.)

LODOÏSKA

You are suffering? You who seemed to everybody the image of felicity! . . . You have everything. All the good things: love, renown, power and faith in this Revolution which your husband and you helped to bring about . . .

SOPHIE

(With intensity)

I have nothing.

LODOÏSKA

No, no! I don't believe you!

(Sophie signals to her to be silent. Denis Bayot approaches.)

DENIS

Shouldn't Jérôme be coming home soon from the Assembly?

SOPHIE

(Resuming the conversational tone)

One can never tell in advance how long the sitting will last. I have sometimes waited all night, till dawn.

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DENIS

Yet there seems to have been nothing very serious on hand today.

SOPHIE

In these times, who can say what is going to happen, an hour ahead?

(In the street behind the garden wall they hear a procession passing with music, fifes and drums, marching in 6/8 time, the rumbling of carts, galloping horses, shouts of the crowd.)

CHLORIS

What is it this time?

HORACE

It's the new batch they are taking to the guillotine. *(He makes a gesture as if he were cutting his throat.)*

CHLORIS

(Stopping her ears)

I will not hear it . . . *(She lifts her hands to her ears and runs towards the garden.)*
Horace, let's go and see! *(She goes out with Horace.)*

DENIS

So the cart passes through here now?

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SOPHIE

Yes, the rue Florentin is torn up just now.
(*Denis goes out, through curiosity, after the two others.*)

LODOÏSKA

(*Left alone with Sophie*)

Sophie, I do not believe you! A moment ago you said . . .

SOPHIE

Let's drop it!

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LODOÏSKA

No, no, I beg you! Treat me as a friend!
(*Sophie points to the door into the garden.*)

LODOÏSKA

Yes, that horrible noise.
(*She runs to close the door and comes back.*
They still hear the jerky march and the cries —
not so loud now.)

LODOÏSKA

Tell me! Tell me! (*She takes Sophie's hands and kisses them.*) Sophie, you are unjust. Haven't you had your fair share of happiness? Nothing has happened to trouble your union, your love.

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SOPHIE

(*Bitterly*)

My love? No one has loved me. I brought my youth, my strength of hope, my need to give myself, to a man whom I respected, whom I respect, admire . . . What has he done with it all? He has sacrificed me to his faith.

LODOÏSKA

Don't you believe in it too?

SOPHIE

Ah, what does *their* faith matter to me! If I loved it, if I thought I loved it, it was because they loved it, they, it was they whom I loved in it . . . What has it done to them and to me?

LODOÏSKA

(*Trying to understand*)

They, you say?

SOPHIE

(*In a transport of anger*)

I say I hate this faith . . . Listen!
(*Through the closed door which deadens the sound an explosion of outcries and violent laughter is heard. Then, as the noise diminishes and silence falls again, Sophie,*

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with a concentrated hatred, resumes in a low voice.)

SOPHIE

I hate them, all these faiths, these nightmares of delusion that men give themselves to, as one gives oneself to a vice that devastates life. Life is there, beside us, quite simple and so sweet! One has only to stoop and pick it up. And they have become incapable of enjoying it. Their faith is a mania, a poison that plunges them into a furious, deadly stupefaction. They have sacrificed me to it . . . Oh! this would never happen again! . . .

LODOÏSKA

(With her eyes fastened on Sophie's lips)
What do you mean?

SOPHIE

They have sacrificed themselves.

LODOÏSKA

What! Your husband?

SOPHIE

No, not he.

LODOÏSKA

But who, then?

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SOPHIE

(As if regretfully, carried away by passion)

You heard . . . just now . . . Those poor fellows . . . Those proscrip̄ts . . .

LODOÏSKA

(Stifling a cry)

It was Vallée!

(Sophie rises to avoid replying. At this moment the door into the garden opens again, and Chloris bursts in crying.)

CHLORIS

Ah, guess, guess whom I saw in the cart!

(Sophie turns away, and Lodoïska with a gesture tries to divert Chloris.)

(Greatly excited)

No! Guess, guess whose throat they are cutting now! . . . The throat of Reason, their Reason, their Reason from St. Eustache . . . that fat little blonde to whom they said the mass . . . I recognized her plainly. Reason, Reason!

DENIS

(Philosophically)

It's a long time, my child, since Reason made its exit!

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CHLORIS

Oh, will you keep still, with your miserable phrases!

(They continue to talk at the back of the room, to the left, near the door into the garden, as if they feel that they are disturbing the conversation of Sophie and Lodoïska. The latter have retired into the opposite corner of the salon, to the right, near the footlights, in the shelter of the harpsichord, which hides them from the sight of the door to the right that leads to the stairs. But they are seated facing the mirror on the left wall in which this door is reflected.)

LODOÏSKA

(In a low beseeching voice, taking Sophie's hands again and not letting them go, in spite of Sophie's efforts to disengage herself)

It was Vallée? . . . Sophie, tell me, it was Vallée?

SOPHIE

(Seated, with her hands clasped, sadly turning her head aside.)

Ah, don't stab me again with his name!

LODOÏSKA

(Dropping Sophie's hands and filled with pity)

Ah, my poor dear! Could I have imagined

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it? . . . How I pity you! It's frightful! . . . And we who, without knowing it, were just now twisting the knife in your heart! . . . Forgive, forgive me! But who could have guessed it? . . . Yes, I certainly used to notice your friendship.

SOPHIE

(In a low, passionate voice)

I loved him. He loved me. It was my whole life. And I was all of his . . . I thought so, at least. But it was not true, for he went off to die for this abominable faith . . . Ah, if he sacrificed himself for this faith, have I not sacrificed him, have I not been sacrificed, to another faith?

LODOÏSKA

What other faith, Sophie?

SOPHIE

(Bitterly)

This conjugal honor which I have always kept.

LODOÏSKA

Sophie, tell me everything! You were not lovers?

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SOPHIE

(With increasing exaltation)

No. And now that is the very thing that makes me despair! In vain he begged me, and my heart drove me in vain to yield to him. The thought of Jérôme and the faith I had given, this superstition of fidelity, which is less a reason of the heart than a habit, this thing people call virtue, this blind idol — I sacrificed everything to it, everything I loved in the world. And now he is dead. And now I have lost him. And for what has it all served? For what?

(Now it is Lodoïska who tries to calm Sophie, whose voice has gradually mounted to a tone of passionate grief. But the rest of the company, who are engaged in an animated conversation, appear to have noticed nothing . . . Sophie is silent. Lodoïska speaks to her in a low voice. Nothing is to be heard but the voices and the laughter of the little group of three friends, standing in the left-hand corner of the room, towards the window over the garden.)

SCENE II

(Suddenly there falls a silence of death. The door to the stairs has just opened, facing Denis, Horace and Chloris. But Sophie and Lodoïska, whose backs are turned and who are shut off by the harpsichord, do not see what is happening.

A man has entered. In the costume of the people, dressed as a Jacobin, with the cockade in his cap. He is covered with mud and has a violent, harassed look. A young man, lean, strong, with glowing eyes, and an air of being pursued. He has opened the door hastily and, as soon as he has entered, shut it again hastily, without a sound, looking back to see if the stairs are silent. Then he turns about, with his back to the door, facing the little group which has seen him entering. The three are startled. They make a gesture of fright, but they are too agitated to be able to articulate a word.

At this moment, Sophie and Lodoïska become surprised by the silence. Lodoïska, turning towards the group at the left, sees the as-

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tonishment on the faces of the others without knowing what it means. Sophie, mechanically turning her eyes towards the great mirror over the fireplace, perceives the reflected image of the man with his back to the door. She rises, with a cry which is not observed in the general confusion. For at the same moment . . .)

DENIS, HORACE, CHLORIS

(Utter a cry)

Vallée!

VALLÉE

(Who has not expected to find them together)

Denis Bayot . . . Bouchet . . . Chloris
. . . My friends . . .

(His voice is hoarse with fatigue and emotion.

He goes over to them hastily and holds out his hand which they take with embarrassment. But already his eyes are seeking, behind them, about them, in the salon, one whom he does not see. Then suddenly he sees her. The others no longer exist. Sophie stands with her two hands resting behind her on the harpsichord, looking at him, her eyes wide with emotion, fear and happiness. They have ceased to think of the others.

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Vallée flings himself towards her, holding out his arms to her. And she goes to him.)

VALLÉE

Sophie!

SOPHIE

You still alive!

(He throws himself at her feet, he embraces her legs, he kisses her knees through her dress, he kisses her feet; and then, lifting himself up but still on his knees, he presses his cheek, his eyes, his mouth against the body of the beloved. She does not prevent him. She caresses with her hands the face of her lover.)

VALLÉE

It is she. I have found her again . . . I have her, I hold her, I have her!

SOPHIE

(Without disengaging herself, taking hold of his head, bending over his face, whispering to him tenderly.)

Stand up!

(Vallée rises, his eyes fastened upon Sophie. But he is scarcely on his feet before he totters, and Sophie holds him up.)

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SOPHIE

He is going to fall! . . . Horace! Lodoïska! . . . My friend, lean on me! . . . What is the matter with you? . . . Lean hard! . . . Come . . . Here . . . in this chair . . .

(She leads him to an armchair, in the corner of the room, at the left, near the footlights. Vallée sits down, facing the audience, with his back turned to the rear of the stage. Consequently, neither he nor Sophie, bending over him, can see what is happening behind them. Denis Bayot, first, vanishes, followed hastily by Chloris, then by Horace Bouchet who, standing in the door opening on the stairs, signals to Lodoïska to join them. Lodoïska, hesitating and touched, looks alternately at Vallée, supported by Sophie, and Horace. At last she makes up her mind and crosses the room to take up her shawl, which is lying on a chair at the rear of the stage to the left. All this, during the short time required for Sophie to guide Vallée to the armchair and place him in it.)

SOPHIE

(Continuing to speak to Vallée without looking behind her.)

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You are dying of fatigue . . . Stretch out . . . You have had nothing to eat? . . . Chloris! Lodoïska! Help me. My friends, bring the coffee . . . There, fetch a cup from the table . . .

(She is surprised by the silence and turns around.)

Where are you? . . . My friends! . . .

VALLÉE

(Motionless, sitting in the chair, without seeing what is happening, has no difficulty in understanding.)

Don't you know that I'm dangerous to everybody who comes near me?

(Lodoïska, alone of the four friends, delayed by her search for the shawl, which has obliged her to cross the room twice, is still on the threshold of the door when Sophie turns round and sees her.)

SOPHIE

(Indignantly)

Lodoïska!

(Lodoïska, touched and shamed by the appeal, stops, turns round, hesitates, returns a few steps towards Sophie who, leaving Vallée, advances towards her.)

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LODOÏSKA

(In a rapid, anxious whisper)

Forgive me! . . . Forgive me! It's base.
I know it . . . But today . . . Today,
above all, I want to live!

(The last word can scarcely be heard. She goes out hastily. Sophie, overwhelmed for an instant, recovers her self-possession, goes and gets a cup from the table, pours out the coffee and brings it to Vallée with a little bread.)

VALLÉE

(Who has not stirred)

Marvel at my power! When I came in, fear comes in. This wretch *(he points at himself)*, who cannot even hold himself on his legs any longer, flees, and everybody flees from him. For five months I have been wandering over the whole of France, driven out of every house. There were seven of us outlaws in Dordogne; Pétion, Barbaroux, Buzot, Guadet, Sallo, Valady. We knocked at the doors of thirty friends. Not one of them would open to us. We dragged over our footprints the shadow of the guillotine. They were so terrified at the sight of us — us and it — that one man whose house we

entered by surprise was going to kill us, and, not being strong enough, threatened to kill himself if we stayed! (*He laughs violently and bitterly.*) One night, we were tramping in torrents of rain through the ploughed fields. We had had to leave the quarries where we had taken shelter. They found out we were there. A last hope led us to a family who were old friends of mine: as a lawyer I had saved the honor of one of their household in a criminal case. Pitch-black night. We were lost. We were floundering up to the thighs in the mud. I had sprained my ankle. After six hours of walking, we arrived, utterly worn out. We knocked at the door. A half hour of waiting. What with the rain and the wind, our teeth were chattering. The door opened a crack. I told my name. The door closed again. Another half hour. I was seized with a chill and lost consciousness. After an hour of deliberation, a frightened reply came that they couldn't take us in. I was lying there stretched out in the mud of the road. My companions shouted through the keyhole, "Just for one hour, a roof for shelter!" The reply was "No!" — "At least a glass of water and a

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little vinegar!" — "No!" — We resumed our flight . . . A curse on man!

(Sophie, standing beside Vallée, listens to him, rigid with sorrowful pity. Vallée, who has poured out this story in a dull voice, broken with bursts of rage and banked-up scorn, with his head hanging down, his sombre stare fixed upon the floor at his feet, suddenly turns to Sophie and asks her, hoarsely, passionately:)

And aren't you going to drive me away?

SOPHIE

(Leaning towards him, tenderly holding out the cup to him.)

My poor friend, take it! You are exhausted.

VALLÉE

(Without taking the cup, in the same bitter tone:)

I bring death with me. So you must drive me away.

SOPHIE

(Lifting the cup to his lips and holding it there while he drinks it.)

Drink!

(He drinks greedily and at once wishes to talk.)

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Don't talk! . . . Eat! . . . You must rest first.

(A few moments of silence, during which Sophie is busied in serving him, and watches him eat, like a pitying mother. Vallée takes her hand, giving it a long kiss. She does not try to withdraw it, but smiles sadly and tenderly.)

SOPHIE

(After a moment, placing her hand on Vallée's head.)

How did you come? How were you able to get as far as this?

VALLÉE

Place yourself in front of me if you want me to have the strength to reply! So I can see you! . . . Closer! . . . Here, sit down! . . .

(He makes her sit down facing him, very close, and he holds her hand while he tells his story.)

God! It is she! . . . No longer that intangible image that has been floating before my footsteps for so many months . . . It is she, I hold her, I feel against my palm the palm of her hands, the pulp of her fingers, the warmth of her flesh melting into

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my own . . . No, don't take them away from me! Don't let me fall back into the abyss that I've come from! Protect me with your hands! It is they that have saved me.

SOPHIE

Thank God they have had the power! . . . My friend, tell me the story. Let's make the most of these moments. How did you save yourself?

VALLÉE

At the moment I was just speaking of, when the ferocious baseness of our friends denied us even the cup of water one wouldn't refuse to a wounded dog who begged for it, the very excess of our despair revived our spirits. Indignation brought back my consciousness and strength. I got up on my feet, shouting, "Let us flee, flee from men, flee into the grave! But conceal ourselves any more from this vile species? No! Straight ahead! Pass over their bodies, or die! No more expedients!" We regained the highway. And there, in the dim light of the day that was dawning through the rain, I embraced my friends, shared with them what little money I had and stripped off my

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bundle of linen and clothes, everything that might weigh me down on my march, for I had decided to return to Paris. My friends thought I was mad; but nothing could have shaken my resolution, and they did not attempt to do so. For when everything is lost, what is the use of being careful? There was no question of living any longer. It was only a question of seeing you again.

SOPHIE

(Astonished)

Me!

VALLÉE

You! Everything I love. You . . . And you know it very well. Useless to play the comedy of society! There is no society any longer. There is nothing any longer. Nothing but you. You and I . . . On that yellow, muddy highway, stretching straight ahead and reeking with fog, the image of that woman — you — sprang up like a light. And in the thrill it gave me I flared up also. Everything also disappeared. One thought only possessed me: before the eternal Nothingness to see her again! . . . A draught of burning wine! . . . It intoxicated

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me. Benumbed, drenched in rain and shaking with fever, my legs swollen and, one moment before, scarcely able to place the sole of my foot on the earth, I was instantly lifted up, driven forward, and, heavy as the burden of my body was, I took it on my shoulders to carry it to you. I thought, "If I fall, at least let her know that as I fell my face was turned towards her!" I was near Ribérac, armed with a false passport from which the visa of the district was lacking. To reach Paris, I had to face on my road more than twenty principal towns of districts and departments. Happily, the peasants don't know how to read. I forged the visa, the signatures, myself. I was obliged to sleep only in the villages and not pass through the towns except where I could elude the attention of the guards posted at the entrance. How I got through I cannot understand. If I had done it in cold blood I should never have succeeded. But my faith carried me along. Every step on the road, every barrier passed, every danger vanquished, brought me closer to her — to you! . . . My illness came on again. I felt sharp pains. Owing to the effort of the walk, I was bathed in

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sweat. When people stopped me and demanded my papers, I exhibited my swollen leg, as if I had been wounded in the Vendée. At every town I heard of the punishment, the death, of one of my companions. At night I lay down in my clothes, with the two pistols in my pocket, and some pills of opium hidden next to my skin in a scrap of a glove. They were never going to capture me alive . . . I got up in the morning weaker than the night before. I went forward more quickly all the time. Like one who is pursued and hears behind him at night footsteps sounding on the frozen earth. The breath of death was at my heels. I feel it. It follows me . . . Are you going to tell me I should have remembered that I was leading this death towards you? . . . I thought of that . . . A chivalrous lover would have given up the hope of seeing his beloved rather than place her in danger. Not I! My love was too strong for me to care about your life. If you were lost, if I were lost, so be it! . . . But not before I saw you again. To see you again, as I do see you. To tell you that I love you . . . *(He grasps her hands and speaks with his face close to hers.)*

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SOPHIE

(Making no effort to disengage herself, both intoxicated together.)

And afterward?

(He is silent, as if he does not understand.)

SOPHIE

Afterward, what is going to become of you?

VALLÉE

I didn't try to see any further.

(They loosen their hands and are silent, hushed by the storm within them. Sophie suddenly turns aside, rises, leans on the back of the harpsichord, waits for the beating of her heart to grow calm. Facing her, Vallée, seated, bending forward, his eyes fixed on the floor, with a hard stare in which the violence is repressed, has not stirred.)

SOPHIE

(Regaining her self-possession, and moving back towards Vallée.)

My friend . . . My dear friend . . . I thank you.

VALLÉE

(Lifting his head angrily)

It isn't your thanks I want.

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SOPHIE

(After a brief pause)

I tremble to think that you are in this town, in this house, where so many people pass who might recognize you.

VALLÉE

What does that matter to me now?

SOPHIE

But it matters to me! You have come here and placed yourself under my protection. I must, I wish to save you.

VALLÉE

There is no safety, there is no longer a refuge on the earth for the man who longed to deliver men.

SOPHIE

You must get to the frontier. You must preserve yourself for better times. They will need you: your cause, your country . . .

VALLÉE

But I no longer need them. I only need you.

SOPHIE

Vallée, I implore you. Do not sacrifice your life. Let us find a place to hide you and a way for you to escape!

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VALLÉE

Escape! Do you imagine that I am going to resume that flight again? Do you fancy one could recommence the ordeal through which I have just passed? Those five months of agony? Reason, human strength would not suffice for it. One couldn't do it without a faith like the one that illumined me when I was coming to you. What would sustain me if I left you?

SOPHIE

(Passionately)

I!

VALLÉE

You!

SOPHIE

I! . . . My love!

VALLÉE

(Rising)

Your love!

SOPHIE

I couldn't live any more if you were no longer alive.

VALLÉE

Then you love me! You love me!

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SOPHIE

You know I do. Why have you forced me to tell you?

VALLÉE

You have said it! Say it again!

SOPHIE

I mustn't.

VALLÉE

You must. Say it again!

SOPHIE

I love you! (*They embrace.*)

VALLÉE

Your lips! Ah! To quench my thirst at last at their spring! Stay! Don't go away! Don't be disgusted with me! Forgive my wretchedness, my squalid clothes, my hands, my muddy feet, my body smelling of sweat and dirt. I am ashamed! . . .

SOPHIE

I love you. I love your wretchedness, I love even the dirt on your hands and the mud on your feet! (*She bends over to kiss his hands and his clothes.*)

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VALLÉE

(Holding her, lifting up her head with his hands, plunging his eyes into the eyes of Sophie, who abandons herself to him. A passionate silence.)

Ah, how beautiful life is! . . . I shall live now. I want to. They shall not capture me! If I could find my way alone through a world of enemies, what can't I brave now that I have won you! . . . Listen to what we are going to do! . . . It will be easy for you to get me a false passport and a disguise, a Jacobite carmagnole. I shall take the public coach that goes from Paris to Dôle. From there I shall go on foot; I know the roads that lead through the high plateaus to the frontier. Before crossing it, I shall find a shelter for a few days in a woodcutter's hut. A week after, you will make your escape from Paris, and come and join me in the refuge which I shall describe to you. Five or six leagues on foot. The roads are under snow. But you will not be afraid of the walk. We shall climb together the slopes of the Juras. From the summit we shall see the country of freedom, Switzerland. A few hours more, and we are saved.

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SOPHIE

(Carried away by the torrent of this will, but struggling to hold herself in.)

We? I? . . . I follow you?

VALLÉE

Now that you are mine!

SOPHIE

(Groaning)

I cannot! I cannot!

VALLÉE

If you wish it, you can.

SOPHIE

I cannot.

VALLÉE

What prevents you?

SOPHIE

My duty.

VALLÉE

(Bitterly)

Duty! In this sinister world, that word only serves to kill. In its name the great Hypocrite, that wretch from Arras, butchers his rivals, and the baseness of friends delivers friends to the executioner. Duty! What senseless abuse we have all made of this

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lying word! . . . Look me in the face! The only truth is there, in your eyes. You and I.

SOPHIE

I see my husband too. He is old, he loves me, he has confidence in me. I should be guilty if I left him.

VALLÉE

You were guilty in marrying him. It is a crime to bind young bodies to old. You have given him all too much. I despise his selfishness in accepting it. Come, don't pity him! He can live without you. He has his science, his glory, his pride, and the friendship of the tyrants. In his life what are you but a fruit that he cannot even pluck.

SOPHIE

I have given myself to him, given myself, of my own will. Can I take myself back now without scorning myself?

VALLÉE

Scorning yourself! In an hour like this, who thinks of scorn? Around us everything is dying, everything is destroyed, all the bonds and the laws that hold men together in society, respect for unhappiness,

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good faith, kindness, everything. Amid the ruins, love alone still shines. All the rest is night.

SOPHIE

(With both her hands upon his, in a low voice, and burning with an inner ecstasy.)

O light!

VALLÉE

(Encircling her with his arms)

You will follow me?

(Sophie, without looking at Vallée, remains in the same ecstatic pose, without replying.)

VALLÉE

(In a commanding voice)

Answer! You follow me? . . .

(Sophie turns slowly towards Vallée a face illumined with love, her hands clasped with the tips of her fingers barely touching her half-opened lips, which are about to speak. Suddenly she draws back, listens and says hastily)

SOPHIE

Some one is coming. Some one is coming up the stairs . . .

(She hastily pushes Vallée into the bedroom, the door of which is open at the left.)

SCENE III

(Jérôme de Courvoisier enters through the door opening on the stairs, at the right. Without seeing Sophie, who remains on the threshold of the door into the bedroom which Vallée has entered, he turns with tottering, hasty steps towards the desk at the left. He is without his hat. His long, gray, floating hair is in disorder, his cravat, with its large knot, is loose; his dress, his movements, his expression, betray bewilderment. His breathing is uneven and obstructed. He utters his words inconsecutively, mingled with groans. He tumbles into a chair before the desk, leaning his elbows among the papers, and hides his eyes in his hands.)

SOPHIE

(Surprised by his appearance and his attitude)
Jérôme!

(He does not move and continues to groan in a low voice.)

SOPHIE

(Anxiously going up to him)

My dear . . .

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(He does not reply. She places her hand on his shoulder, questioning him anxiously.)

What is the matter with you?

(He raises his head towards her, and, breathing hard, looks at her, then drops back again.)

SOPHIE

(Leaning over, raises his forehead with her hands and says with anxious affection:)

You are suffering? What has happened to you?

(Jérôme de Courvoisier makes an effort to smile at his wife, to regain his composure; he opens his mouth to speak. He cannot do so. He half lifts himself up and tries to reach with his hand an object that lies on the little stand near by on which lie the coffee-cups.)

SOPHIE

What would you like me to give you?

(Jérôme points to a flask.)

SOPHIE

(Giving it to him)

Brandy? You never drink it!

(Jérôme takes the flask, pours out a full glass, drinks it at a gulp.)

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JÉRÔME

O God, I am foundering in this welter of humanity . . .

SOPHIE

What unexpected blow has shaken you?
. . . My dear, where have you come from?

JÉRÔME

From the Convention.

SOPHIE

The sitting is ended?

JÉRÔME

No. But I couldn't stay to the end.

SOPHIE

What has happened? What new acts of violence? Can anything surprise you? You know men.

JÉRÔME

They are men no longer! They are a herd of animals, servile and cruel. All the instincts of baseness and ferocity have come to the surface. Meat for the butcher. Vile dogs crouching and sniffing the odor of blood. Wolves and hyenas prowl about this den. The great hall is half emptied. More than two hundred have fled, are dead, have disappeared. On the right side, a desert. The

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survivors of those who used to occupy it have run away from their places, crawled up on their bellies to the summit of the Mountain. Even the most cautious — now that no place is safe — have changed constantly, for one never knows where the blow is going to fall, high or low. They try to seem nobodies, to get themselves forgotten. Their shifting, spying eyes watch, to the left, to the right, the shivers of the herd, the least motion of the wolves — the sloping forehead of Robespierre and his yellow eyes under the spectacles — the lowered brow, the red-streaked eyes of Billaud — the blue ice in the sockets of that hawk Saint-Just . . . He is in the tribune. He is going to speak. Silence. With his neck stiffened, he scans with his cold, hovering glance those backs that bend and try to avoid him; he goes over them one by one; upon which is he going to pounce? No haste. He has time. No one dares to move . . . For six months, in this den, the opposed passions have been roaring like waves of the sea: Girondins, Montagnards, like two attacking armies, have faced each other with voice and act, their weapons in their hands, with the thunder of the tribunes

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amid this mêlée, the roaring of two thousand heads. Today, the place is a tomb. When one of the butchers speaks, one can hear the flies buzzing over the corpses. All these motionless bodies shiver in a nightmare of expectation. Once one has entered the cattle-pen, no one knows what he is going to do or what is going to be done to him. No one knows whether his life is not going to be called for, or whose life he is going to demand. The threshold once passed (and one has to pass it, for one cannot slip away without making oneself a marked man), no one is himself any longer. The colleague, the friend who has held your arm a moment before, is a stranger to you . . . What does he think of me? And what do I think of him? Everyone is an enigma to everyone else . . . The next instant, perhaps, I shall see him rise, with a threat in his eyes, and, foaming at the mouth, shout out against me, with the rest of the pack . . . Or perhaps it will be I who will take the lead . . . For a moment may come when I know that my neighbor is going to demand my head if I do not take his first . . .

(Jérôme has uttered all this with his hands

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trembling, in a mad excitement. At this instant, he interrupts himself and starts to pick up the flask of brandy again. But Sophie firmly removes the flask from her husband's hand, sits down close beside him, and touches his arm affectionately.)

SOPHIE

You mustn't excite yourself! Regain your composure! . . . Tell me what has happened. I am trying to understand . . . Saint-Just spoke, you say? New proscriptions? You didn't agree to them?

JÉRÔME

(Nodding)

New proscriptions, yes.

SOPHIE

But against whom? They have struck all their enemies. Those of the left, those of the right. The poor Gironde is dead and gone. The Commune is broken. It is not eight days since Hébert's head fell, and Chaumette's and Cloots's. Who remains for them to destroy?

JÉRÔME

Themselves. They are devouring each other. After making a void around the

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Republic, they are killing the Republic . . .
This morning at six o'clock they arrested . . .

SOPHIE

Whom?

JÉRÔME

Danton.

SOPHIE

Danton?

JÉRÔME

We are not friends. I did not like the man. That frothy violence, that torrent full of mud, that frenzied demon, lawless and calculating, those low instincts and that astuteness, filled me with disgust. Too often his vociferations covered nothing but anxiety and uncertainty. But who could refuse to recognize the lustrous services his glorious audacity rendered to the Republic? . . . Who has not seen that prodigious figure, on dark days, standing erect in the fog, crowned with lightning, like the very genius of the Revolution? . . . When the report of the arrest reached the Assembly, all who were present fell into a frozen stupor. There was not one who did not feel that this man was sacred, that he belonged to the inviolable patrimony of the nation. And very few who

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had not personally experienced the effects of his rough kindness. Many, on the worst days, had placed themselves under the aegis of this Medusa's head. A whole flock of followers had fed upon his crumbs. But this terrified crowd whispered and was silent. And I was silent like the rest . . .

At last, one of his clan who was known to all as a satellite of the sinking star, feeling that he was himself involved with him in the downfall, instinctively made a motion to save him. Legendre, a vulgar man, who, under the shadow of Danton, played with his thunder . . . Fear lent him strength; it gave him a voice; he demanded — shouting to keep his courage up — the liberty of Danton. And already most of the others, reassured by this cry emerging from the silence, were beginning to uphold him with their murmurs. Some even took the risk of applauding. A few more minutes, and the Convention might have found the courage not to allow itself to be assassinated.

Suddenly, Robespierre entered. The roar that had risen from their hearts froze at once. As he passed, their thoughts hastened to hide behind their faces. And once more

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silence surrounded the man who was speaking. Legendre caught sight of Robespierre. Carried away by his excitement, he continued to shout for another moment, and his cries fell into the void. Then he lost his footing, interrupted himself, began again, faltered. In the middle of a phrase he struck his fist on the tribune, stopped short and dived down. Slowly, by the other staircase, Robespierre mounted. Without deigning to reply to the shouts of the terrified animal who was now doing his best to make himself forgotten, he read in his colorless voice the mandate of arrest issued the night before by the three Committees. He spoke in vague terms of a great conspiracy. He congratulated "the powerful Senate" for "snatching from its breast all the unworthy members who have betrayed the cause" . . . And suddenly, a threat coming into his voice, he turned towards Legendre, who was cowering behind another man, and, appearing not to see him, called for the secret accomplices who were defending the traitors from the sword of the Law. Legendre, stammering, asked permission to answer. But the other, implacable, pretended not to

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hear him. He finished unrolling his cadenced periods, in which Death was enveloped in the flowers of rhetoric, and stepped down again, leaving the axe, garlanded with laurels, suspended over the head of the Assembly.

The silence grew deeper and deeper, like an abyss. From the depths mounted again the shouts of Legendre, baying at Death. But this time the hound had only one thought: to cower under the whip and regain his pardon by licking the foot that kicked him. He excused himself convulsively for not having known, for not having realized . . . protesting his zeal to deliver up his friend or his brother if they were criminals, casting off the fallen man and calling to witness, in extenuation of his own weak denial, the weakness of the Assembly . . . without a single soul daring to hold out a hand to him, without the slightest relaxation of the silent threat of the Impassible, who was watching the miserable creature drown.

The man sank. A flood of scorn and fear covered him . . . Then one of the Montagnards, in the name of the Assembly, congratulated the Committees whose vigilance

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had foiled these new plots. And from various sides of the hall the voices joined in. But Robespierre, who knows the versatility of Assemblies, was not satisfied with these voices without heads that could not be seized. He desired that the Convention should declare itself by signed ballots and ratify the judgment — or rather, since the judgment was determined in advance — the burial of Danton.

SOPHIE

And you voted?

JÉRÔME

They all voted. They all pressed towards the tribune, under the eye of the proscribers. A few with their heads hanging, with a less assured voice. Most of them affecting a Roman firmness, with a voice of brass and fear wailing in their entrails. And Legendre voted. Legendre sold his master. Five or six of us looked on in disgust. Each of us waiting for his turn to vote. And when the turn came, each rose, went up and cast his vote, his stone, on the vanquished.

SOPHIE

And you cast yours?

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JÉRÔME

When my turn came I got up and went out.

SOPHIE

You didn't vote! . . .

JÉRÔME

I was near the exit. They called my name. Some one behind me touched my shoulder and repeated "Courvoisier!" . . . A man — who was he? — was standing in front of the door. I pushed him from the threshold and left the room. When I was in the street, I had an attack of dizziness and was on the point of falling. A passer-by who saw me tottering came up, took me by the arm, led me to a café, made me drink a cordial. I collected my strength, so as not to make a spectacle of myself, and came home . . . I would have liked to lie down on the ground, under the ground, and never rise again . . . Disgust, disgust for myself. Humanity, Reason, Liberty. What a mockery! Mockery of my faith! Man is born for servitude. Man is born to betray. Everything people have done to render him free, everything people have attempted to lift him up only serves to reveal his bestiality. What have I

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done? I have lost my life! . . . (*He falls over the table again, his head in his hands.*)

SOPHIE

(*Who has listened to him with a pang and a growing pity.*)

Poor man! Poor man! (*She leans over towards him, draws away his hands and holds them.*) Jérôme, my friend! . . . My dear husband! Do not give up hope. I understand you. I pity you. What you have suffered, I suffer with you . . . But I don't want you to lose your faith . . . *our* faith . . .

JÉRÔME

(*Lifting his head, in a tone of doubt*)

SOPHIE

It is mine too. No doubt men are base, cruel, deceitful . . . Alas! We know too well how many monsters, how many unworthy thoughts, we ourselves carry within us which we dare not utter, and which humiliate us . . . But it is because we know it that we have undertaken this Revolution, to liberate men and raise them. We have not concealed from ourselves either the difficulties or the dangers. Perhaps our mistake was

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to believe too soon that the battle was won. But in these first days of the liberation, it was good to abandon ourselves to the embrace of all the souls of France. Should we regret it? That could not last. But who would not envy us — who will not envy us for having known this happiness, once in our life? We have plucked its flower. And the flower has withered. We have paid since for our momentary joy. It is hard. But this had to be. You who have learned, in your scientific labors, to recognize the inflexible laws of nature — is this a reason for you to doubt or renounce? You have had the strength to climb high enough to embrace in a large vision the land beyond the mountains and that winding stream, the Progress of the Human Spirit. You have never believed that, to follow its course, a few years were enough; you looked forward to centuries, with more than one pause, more than one backward movement. No, we, with our eyes, shall not see the Promised Land. But is it not much already to know where it lies and to be able to point out the way? The others will come, younger than we, and carry on the interrupted journey. Let us who are bound to

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the present hour console ourselves in them! Against the fearful spectacle that oppresses you, my dear, there remain so many resources in yourself! Your own work, your researches, your discoveries, this kingdom of science, which escapes the follies of men and their wickedness and is going to free them, whether they wish it or not . . .

JÉRÔME

(Gradually regaining his composure. With his hands in the hands of his wife, he no longer removes his eyes from hers.)

Ah, that does one good! . . . In your mouth, those thoughts . . . That faith, my lost faith, coming back to me through you . . . My wife! . . . You love me then? . . . I thought not!

(He kissed her hands. Sophie anxiously turns away her head while her husband bends over her hands.)

JÉRÔME

(Lifting his eyes to hers, looking at her gratefully and humbly begging for a response.)

Sophie, you really have a little affection for me?

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SOPHIE

(Trying to escape)

Ah, I trembled just now, during your story . . . I feared . . . I feared . . .

JÉRÔME

(With a sad smile)

You were afraid that I was weak?

SOPHIE

No, don't say that word!

JÉRÔME

Haven't I shown it enough?

SOPHIE

You refused to degrade yourself with the others.

JÉRÔME

Ah, I should have spoken; I fled. I am a poor creature who has only the feeble courage *not to do . . .*

(Vallée appears on the threshold of the bedroom and, without being observed, looks at them with jealous vexation. When their eyes turn mechanically in his direction, he withdraws into the bedroom.)

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SOPHIE

(Affectionately)

You are a poor creature, weak, and that is why . . . *(She checks herself.)*

JÉRÔME

(Drawing her to him by the hands which he has not dropped.)

And that is why? . . . *(She does not respond and he insists.)* And that is why? . . . Tell me! . . . That you have a little . . . a little kindness for me?

SOPHIE

(Embarrassed, escaping again)

And that is why, my friend, because you are weak it is all the more meritorious for you to risk your life. For you have risked it. Do not depreciate yourself by speaking of your flight! . . .

JÉRÔME

It is true. And I know they will demand a reckoning from me. For two months now my opinions have been under suspicion. All my steps are followed, all my words noted, even my silences. The informers are spying on me. They are among my friends. Today I was even able *(I waited, to be sure, before making you share my suspicions about him),*

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I was able to obtain the proofs that old Denis Bayot . . .

SOPHIE
(*Terrified*)

Great God!

JÉRÔME

He goes and reports everything that is said here . . .

SOPHIE
No, I can't believe it! That old man . . . that gentle, timid old man . . . what motive?

JÉRÔME
(*Shrugging his shoulders*)

To gain security for himself . . . And then, in times like ours, infamy is a leprosy; one sees good people suddenly seized with a need for befouling themselves . . .

SOPHIE
(*Terrified*)

Jérôme! He was here! . . .

JÉRÔME
Who? Bayot? Today?
(*She nods, too much agitated to speak.*)

JÉRÔME
What do you fear, Sophie? I know how prudent you are . . .

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SOPHIE

He was here when . . . someone came in . . .

JÉRÔME

When who came in?

SOPHIE

A proscrip't, seeking asylum . . . Vallée . . .

JÉRÔME

(With an exclamation of surprise and joy)

Vallée! . . . He is alive! He has come! . . . Sophie, you took him in? You didn't close our door to him? Where is he?

SOPHIE

There he is!

(She points to Vallée who, at the sound of his name, has come to the threshold of the door. Then, to bide her emotion, she goes out through the door opening on the stairs, leaving the two men alone, as if she wished to watch at the entrance.)

SCENE IV

JÉRÔME

(Approaching Vallée, holding out his arms)

My friend!

(Vallée does not stir. After a short pause, Jerome continues to move towards him.)

You were able to escape! . . . They said . . . God be praised! . . . *(He has reached Vallée and is on the point of embracing him. But Vallée turns away as he enters the salon and keeps at a distance.)*

VALLÉE

(With cold irony)

Let us leave God to his own affairs! He takes no interest in ours. God belongs to Robespierre.

JÉRÔME

(Stopped short in his outburst of affection, shocked for a moment, then going on.)

Vallée! I see you again! . . . In the midst of the cares and the deep misery that assail me today, it is as if a ray of sunshine had come in with you . . . *(He takes*

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several steps towards Vallée and this time holds out his hand which Vallée does not take.)

VALLÉE

(In the same tone of cold irony)

Don't come closer. You might burn yourself.

JÉRÔME

(Amazed, recoiling a step)

Vallée, my friend! . . . What is this? You don't want to touch my hand? . . . You mistrust me? . . . My house is yours . . . I am grateful to you for choosing it as a refuge. Do you doubt my friendship? It has been faithful to you.

VALLÉE

(Bitterly)

I know this sort of friendship whose fidelity for the past year has been delivering us up to our murderers.

JÉRÔME

(Sadly)

Vallée, it is true I have done very little to defend you. But — I make no excuses — condemn me if you wish — you don't consider the insane asylum in which we are shut up and the impossibility of getting a single

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word of reason into it. It's an epidemic. The healthiest brains are gradually affected by it. Four years of excessive tension, frenzied speeches and feverish writings, of terror, suspicion, Messianic hopes and bitter disappointments have resulted in a poisoned atmosphere. The menace of death infects every mind. Men cannot with impunity maintain themselves for years on the edge of that sword, "Conquer or die." The blood stains them and they go mad. Anyone who tried to recall them to the feelings of humanity would be torn by the teeth of those tigers. Alas, it was your friends, Vallée, it was your party, it was you who, first of all, in declaring war on Europe and plunging the nations into civil strife, unchained the furies that have devoured you!

VALLÉE
(*Cuttingly*)

We refused to compound with crime.
Others make terms with it to save their lives.

JÉRÔME
(*Hurt, but controlling himself*)

More important than our lives is the work
of our lives, our young Revolution. It has

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so many enemies! Do not let us add our hatreds! We ought to sacrifice all our passions for it.

VALLÉE

(Insultingly)

Sacrifice costs nothing to those who have no passions, who have only interests.

JÉRÔME

(Not wishing to understand him)

Let us not speak of such people. Let us ignore base souls! For you and me only those exist who live for ideas.

VALLÉE

There are those who die for them and there are those who live on them.

JÉRÔME

(Crying out)

Vallée, what do you mean? . . . What is the matter with you? . . . You act as if you had a grudge against me.

VALLÉE

(After a moment, full of hatred)

I have.

JÉRÔME

(Sorrowfully)

At this moment when your life is in danger everywhere, when Paris is full of your ene-

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mies, can't you recognize the attachment of a man who, without sharing your beliefs, respects them and would like to save you?

VALLÉE

(Furiously)

No, I don't recognize it! Your attachment is a lie! You are attached to nothing but yourself, your own safety, your prudent work, your neutrality. Accurst be the tyrants that are assassinating France! But may she vomit forth the neutrals! . . . You know how I hate that monster Robespierre, that sinister impostor, the executioner of the Republic, who has sold himself to Austria! I pray for a second Corday, and I would kiss the knife that tore out his heart. But I hate no less the cautious souls who keep silent, who, in this fearful struggle, treat crime and virtue with equal respect, who are indifferent to everything and are only interested in their game of balancing things, who are always ready to serve one at the expense of the other, and betray that the next day! . . .

JÉRÔME

(Controlling himself, very calm, but with an inward shudder.)

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Vallée, these words are not addressed to me.

VALLÉE
(*Furiously*)

To you!

JÉRÔME
(*Astonished, pausing a moment before replying*)
But if you hate me so, why have you sought shelter in my house?
(*Vallée does not answer, but his glance passes beyond Courvoisier to the door leading to the stairs which is opening. Sophie comes in. He looks at her with passionate intensity. Jérôme notices his sudden change of expression, and, turning to find the cause, sees his wife coming towards him.*)

SCENE V

SOPHIE

(Greatly agitated, closing the door and running to Jérôme.)

They are coming, they are coming! . . .
Jérôme, he is lost! . . .

(Jérôme watches the eyes of Vallée who, in no way moved by Sophie's words, does not conceal his delight at seeing her. Then he turns to Sophie as if he were studying her anxiety. In his preoccupation, he pays no attention to the meaning of what she says.)

SOPHIE

(Grasping his arm)

Quick! Quick! Jérôme . . . Don't you hear me?

JÉRÔME

Who is coming? What have you seen?

SOPHIE

The street is surrounded. Troops of armed men are going from one house to another. There is a guard at our door. Come and see!
(She leads Jérôme to the window at the right,

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which is draped with heavy curtains. She lifts a corner of the curtain, and Jérôme bends forward to look. Vallée follows them but has eyes only for Sophie.)

JÉRÔME

They are searching the houses in the quarter.

SOPHIE

Do you think that man could have denounced us already?

JÉRÔME

Who? Denis Bayot? . . . No . . . At least, not yet. This is some general measure that doesn't concern us alone . . . See that band just going into the house opposite . . . No doubt it's some systematic search ordered by the Committee of Surveillance of the section . . . All the houses are being visited. But it is quite possible that after today's incidents our own may be searched with particular care.

SOPHIE

(Struck with fear)

Claude, fly!

JÉRÔME

Claude? . . . Ah, yes, Vallée! . . . Flight is impossible . . . Look, the bars are closed

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at the end of the street. A sentry is stationed there. No one can go out before the search is ended . . . They are going from door to door. After the house opposite it will be our turn. We have a quarter of an hour.

SOPHIE

(Gradually losing her self-control)

Jérôme, he must be saved!

JÉRÔME

(Still calm)

My dear, our lives are all equally threatened.

SOPHIE

(Excitedly)

But he! If they find him he is lost!

JÉRÔME

You are lost just as much if they find him here.

SOPHIE

(Carried away by her passion)

I care nothing about my life if only I can save his!

VALLÉE

(His eyes shining)

I no longer fear anything, now that I have attained my end!

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SOPHIE

No, the end is to live. I don't want you to die!

VALLÉE

To live or die together!

SOPHIE

(Passionately)

To live!

VALLÉE

(Bursting with happiness)

We shall live!

(They have forgotten everything, everything about them, the danger and Jérôme who is watching them both, hand in hand, with their eyes fixed upon one another.)

JÉRÔME

(After a silence, very coldly)

The minutes are numbered, and if you wish to live you must not lose them, no matter how well employed these may seem to you. *(At these words, Sophie recovers herself. She drops Vallée's hand and he draws back in turn. She moves towards Jérôme, but without daring to look him in the face, her eyes full of anxiety.)*

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JÉRÔME

Sophie, you know the recess behind the wainscot at the back of that room (*he points to the bedroom at the left*), in the wall of the alcove, which I made myself for keeping documents that could not fall into everybody's hands without danger. There is room there for a man to lie down. Make Vallée go in and carefully replace the partition and the tapestry over him. If the search is limited, as it usually is, to a simple general visit to the section, they will merely walk through and we shall have a chance of escaping.

SOPHIE

Come! Hurry, Vallée!

JÉRÔME

Wait! . . . We must arrange for everything. If the search is at the order of the Committee of Security, or if that man, that Bayot, has already betrayed us, no corner, no wall, will be overlooked. In that case, there is nothing to do. A single recourse remains to us . . . Take this! . . . (*From a fold of his large cravat he draws a small satchet, which he opens, dividing the contents.*) This

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poison is sure. I got it from Cabanis . . .
For you, Vallée . . . Sophie . . . I keep
my share . . . Come! . . .

*(Sophie stirred, Vallée agitated, both of them
torn by conflicting emotions, look at Jérôme
who no longer looks at them but goes to the
window. They go out the door into the bed-
room.)*

SCENE VI

(Jérôme de Courvoisier turns and, with his eyes fixed upon the door through which they have disappeared, slowly walks back to the middle of the stage.)

JÉRÔME

(With bitter irony)

They are lovers. What savage fury have jealousy and the approach of death breathed into my best friend! He would not hesitate to kill me in order to rob me of my wife . . . And she was his accomplice, she to whom I have just revealed all my wretchedness; no doubt she is praying for my death. Why not? I am the obstacle that prevents them from gratifying their passions . . . Well, let them have their satisfaction. I shall not stand in their way much longer . . . It gives me no pleasure to hold by force one whose only desire is to be free of me. And I no longer have any wish to remain bound to this ignoble humanity . . . Ignoble? No, absurd. It is not even worthy of scorn . . . One single being still gave me reason to believe in it.

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That reason has been swept away . . . It's a good thing . . . If those two unfortunates can still find pleasure in life, great good may it do them! As for me, I resign my own . . . (*He goes to his bookcase and removes from a large folio volume some sheets of manuscript that have been inserted under the parchment cover.*) In these pages that condemn them, the executioners will find my order of arrest all ready for them. (*He arranges the manuscripts in plain sight on the table in the middle of the room. Then he turns towards the window on the street and looks out.*) They are coming out of the other house . . . They are crossing the street . . . They are coming in . . . I am ready.

SCENE VII

(A band of men is heard heavily mounting the stairs. Loud knocks on the door. Jérôme, without haste, goes and opens it. Enter a deputy and ten armed men. The costume of the deputy consists of wide trousers of black woolen stuff, a short jacket of the same material, a tricolored vest, a Jacobin wig of short, straight, black hair, a red cap, a sabre, long mustachios. He is in what would be called a complete carmagnole. The men have only portions of this attire. Many, without jacket or vest, are in sabots and armed with pikes.)

CRAPART

Committee of Security! . . .

JÉRÔME

Come in! . . . So it's you, Citizen Crapart?

CRAPART

(Who has shown his animosity from the first)
You didn't expect this?

JÉRÔME

(Calm and scornful)

I expect anything.

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CRAPART

(Jeering and threatening)

So we see each other again, eh?

JÉRÔME

Naturally, when one of us — it wasn't I — seeks the other.

CRAPART

I haven't come here to waste my saliva. Is your head well screwed on?

JÉRÔME

That's for you to find out!

CRAPART

(To the others)

Come on! *(He whistles, as if he were calling dogs.)* Look around! Look around! Raid the place!

JÉRÔME

Well said. That's just what it is.

CRAPART

We'll see who laughs last.
(The men begin to push the furniture about roughly, pull open the drawers, tumble everything pell-mell on the floor, scatter the papers. At the sound, Sophie comes in from the adjoining room. She goes up to Jérôme, who

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*stands motionless in the centre of the room
with his back turned to the intruders.)*

JÉRÔME

*(Without moving, almost without opening his
mouth.)*

It's done?

SOPHIE

(Nodding, then whispering)

Is there any hope?

JÉRÔME

(In an undertone)

None at all.

SOPHIE

Who is he?

JÉRÔME

Crapart. A scamp I had arrested as a
silver-merchant two years ago in the Arab
quarter.

CRAPART

(To one of his men)

Timoléon, clean the chimney!

*(The man sticks his pike up the chimney and
stirs it about energetically.)*

CRAPART

A little damp straw! . . . Doucin, bring
it here, light it! If the fox is inside, you will
hear him cough!

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SOPHIE

(To Jérôme, in a low voice)

Do they know?

(Jérôme shrugs his shoulders.)

CRAPART

(To his men)

Rummage! Rummage!

JÉRÔME

(To Crapart)

At least spare those fragile works of art.

(He points to the Japanese screen.)

CRAPART

Art's an aristo.

(One of the men, who is sounding the walls with his pike, thrusts it into one of the large canvas portraits. Sophie utters a cry.)

CRAPART

(Dashing up to the man)

Ha! Ha! . . . Give it another push!

(The man drives his pike into the portrait again.)

Do you feel something behind it? . . .
Nothing? . . . *(He turns to Sophie.)* Why
did you cry out?

(Sophie looks him up and down scornfully.)

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CRAPART

(*Furiously*)

You don't condescend to answer me? . . .
Any more than you'd answer a dog? . . .
By God, Citizeness, we're going to see
whether you are hiding something under your
picture . . . Not that one . . . Your skin
. . . We're going to hunt for your fleas.

(*Jérôme makes a movement to push Crapart
away. Crapart thrusts him aside roughly
with the butt of his musket.*)

You keep still, old man! . . . Your turn's
coming next. I have an order to search
everything, and I'm doing it . . . But we
know what is due to the modesty of the sex.
We are not going to inspect your charms,
Citizeness . . . Peau d'Ane! (*He calls.*)
. . . Where is that strumpet? . . . Peau
d'Ane!

(*Peau d'Ane appears at the door by the stairs.
She is a girl with her hair down, puffy
cheeks and a massive bosom.*)

You were trying to pick up another swell,
were you? Just let me catch you at it! . . .
Come! . . . Take this pretty one into the
bedroom there and see if she has a fugitive
under her chemise!

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(They laugh. Sophie makes a gesture of revolt; then she glances towards the door of the bedroom where she has bidden Vallée and goes into the other room, near the garden, followed by Peau d'Ane.)

JÉRÔME

(Aside)

Come! As usual, they're looking everywhere where there isn't anything to find, and you have to force them to see what is under their noses.

(He goes up to the centre table where, in plain sight, lie the papers which he had placed there but at which none of the men has thought of looking. With deliberate clumsiness he manages to catch Crapart's attention by snatching them up quickly as if he wished to hide them.)

CRAPART

(Leaping upon him)

Stop! . . . Give me that! . . . Give me that! . . . *(He snatches the papers from him, turns them over rapidly and reads:)*

"Treatise on Servitude" . . . "The Slave Republic" . . . *I've got him! (He shakes the papers under Jérôme's nose.)* He must be

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hiding others . . . Taffetas, hold his hands!
Vachard, empty his pockets!

(One man holds Jérôme's two wrists behind his back while the other searches him under Crapart's eyes.)

CRAPART

I've got your head!

JÉRÔME

(With cold scorn)

Eat it!

(Enter Lazare Carnot, in the costume of a member of the Committee of Public Safety. He is tall, with blue eyes, a large brow, supercilious, bitter, haughty, sarcastic — suggests a "sneering common sense.")

SCENE VIII

CARNOT

(Stopping a moment on the threshold, looks about with surprise, grasps what is happening and cries, in a ringing voice:)

Jackanapes, what are you doing here?
(The men turn their heads towards the door.)

THE MEN

Carnot! . . . Carnot of the Grand Committee!

CARNOT

(With great strides he approaches Crapart, whom he thrusts roughly aside; he snatches Jérôme from the hands that are holding him.)

Blackguards! . . . Paws down!

CRAPART

(Resisting)

I have my orders.

CARNOT

And I give orders.

CRAPART

It's my duty to search.

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CARNOT

Your duty is to respect those who are respectable. Release that man!

CRAPART

Do the enemies of the Republic have privileges?

CARNOT

Idiot! The Republic owes more to that head than it owes to a hundred ass's heads like yours. It was his discoveries that furnished the armies of the Revolution with those terrible engines that made them victorious at Wattignies.

CRAPART

Victory is no warrant of public spirit. I distrust eagles.

CARNOT

You think they fly too high?

CRAPART

They go beyond the ordinary level. They should have their wings clipped! Everybody equal!

CARNOT

All toads like you! (*Crapart's men laugh.*)
But until the world gets down to your level,

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Crapart, the Republic needs leaders. And I am one of them. Leave this house!

CRAPART

I go if I choose. You are not the master here. I represent the Committee of Security. I will not allow anyone to make a joke of it . . .

CARNOT

The Grand Committee is not in the habit of joking. Woe to those who resist its orders!

CRAPART

All right. I'm leaving because I am good and ready. But the Committee of Security shall hear about this. And if you have my head, I have that fellow's. (*He rattles the papers he has taken from Jérôme and goes out with his men, accompanied by Peau d'Ane. Jérôme and Carnot are left alone.*)

SCENE IX

CARNOT

What did he take?

JÉRÔME

My act of accusation.

CARNOT

Your act as accuser or as accused?

JÉRÔME

As both. In those papers I accuse the abuse of the Constitution and the despots who exploit it.

CARNOT

You are flinging stones at the sky. The stone falls back on you.

JÉRÔME

I know it. The truth kills.

CARNOT

Courvoisier, time presses, I knew this when I came, but matters have moved even faster than I expected. It didn't occur to me that I should find these spies here.

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JÉRÔME

So the Committee of Public Safety did not send them?

CARNOT

The Committee of Public Safety has no need of spies. A man's friends are enough.

JÉRÔME

Denis Bayot has spoken?

CARNOT

Yes.

JÉRÔME

So I don't need to tell you anything.

CARNOT

You are hiding a dog of a Girondist here.

JÉRÔME

You don't expect me to give him up?

CARNOT

No. Put him out! Let him go and lose his head somewhere else. I didn't come here to talk to you about him. Wherever he is, or wherever he goes, the skin of that rascal is not worth much now. I came to speak to you about yourself.

JÉRÔME

What do you mean?

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CARNOT

Courvoisier, you know what it is; you have become suspect. This is not a matter of yesterday. Your uncertain attitude during the last few months, your silent disapproval of the acts of the Committee, your very abstention, have marked you out as an enemy. It has not been difficult for them to fathom your private feelings. Nothing but the services you have rendered, and the intervention of Prieur, Jean-Bon, and myself, who have been anxious to save a head like yours for the national defence, has been able to protect you. But today the cup is full. The scandal of your wild words at the sitting of the Assembly, your precipitate flight, have fanned the irritation of the Committee into a blaze. A violent scene has just taken place. We are outflanked. The majority wish to make an end of the silent resistance which is more pernicious than the open resistance. They give you your choice, either to come out frankly for the new decrees, that is, against the proscripts, or to join them. And I have come to tell you that you must go this evening to the Jacobin meeting, mount the tribune and pronounce yourself in favor

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of the decrees. It is the condition imposed on your safety.

JÉRÔME

(Calmly)

I refuse it. I agree that for a year my behavior has been too uncertain. I revealed again today an indecision that was unworthy of me. But since then, circumstances — it is needless to say what — have given me clarity of vision and tranquillity of soul. And I shall be happy to assume my responsibilities at last.

CARNOT

Which responsibilities?

JÉRÔME

I shall scourge the proscriptions and the dictatorship of blood.

CARNOT

You shall not do it. You haven't the right. For that matter, you haven't even the power.

JÉRÔME

I have the right of my conscience and the power to sacrifice myself for it.

CARNOT

You madman, can't you see that it would not be possible to destroy the Committee at

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this time without ruining our work, the Republic?

JÉRÔME

Our work was to establish the rights of the free man.

CARNOT

For man to become free he must first be protected against those who enslave him. The rights of the individual are nothing without the force of the State.

JÉRÔME

They are nothing when they are sacrificed to the force of the State.

CARNOT

They are nothing. But they will be something. We must be able to sacrifice the present to the future.

JÉRÔME

To sacrifice truth and love to the future, all the human virtues and one's own self-respect, is to sacrifice the future also. Justice will not grow in a corrupt soil.

CARNOT

Let us speak frankly, Courvoisier! We are both men of science. We both know the inexorability of the laws of Nature. She has

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no ear for sentimentality, and to accomplish her ends she tramples the virtues of men under her feet. Virtue is the end. I desire the end, no matter what price I pay for it. I did not determine the price. I accept it. These men of guile and blood disgust me as much as they do you — more, perhaps. I have to live with them, side by side, more than you do. I loathe the acts of violence to which they make me subscribe every day. But I do not feel that I have the right to refuse them my help or to desert the battle because it soils my hands. I keep my mind fixed on the object for which the battle is fought. The progress of humanity is well worth a certain amount of filth — and, if it must be, crime.

JÉRÔME

I understand you, Carnot. I do not blame your lack of pity. Science, as you say, does without pity. Like you, I distrust sentimentality. But I also distrust ideology. And, as I am older than you, I no longer have your faith in Human Progress. I am too much the man of science to believe unreservedly any one of our hypotheses (for this is nothing more). And however flatter-

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ing it may be to the genius of man and his ardent hope, I shall never set him up as a god on an altar to be nourished by the bloody odor of sacrifices. Nothing is sacred to me but life, the present life.

CARNOT

And you give up your own?

JÉRÔME

I refuse to give up for it the life of another.

CARNOT

That life is lost in any case.

JÉRÔME

My life is not lost if it sets the example of one free soul against a vile epoch of cowards and tyrants.

CARNOT

To the devil with your soul! What matters to me is your life. I need your brain. Courvoisier, we must have your work, your genius. The nation demands them. You have been mobilized. You haven't the right to fly. You defraud the country of the fruits that are due to it.

JÉRÔME

I am sorry to interrupt the work I have begun. The love of truth is the only thing

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that never betrays one. Its patient, fervent search is the one lasting good. But we have learned during these last years that we must always be ready, from one day to another, to renounce all that belongs to us, riches, honor, happiness, love, work and life. I am ready.

CARNOT

Egoist! You think only of yourself in making the gift of yourself! . . . I am ready too, so far as myself is concerned, but I am not ready on your account. I cannot resign myself to it . . . Courvoisier, in the name of the old esteem and the community of work that binds us! . . . Accept the conditions of safety I bring you!

JÉRÔME

I cannot. (*He moves away.*)

CARNOT

(*Shrugging his shoulders*)

Theorem! Obstinate mule! . . . (*He waits a moment, then takes a few steps towards Jérôme and offers him some papers.*) Here, take them!

JÉRÔME

(*Taking the papers and unfolding them*)

What are they?

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CARNOT

I was certain of this in advance. I know the obstinacy of mathematicians . . . Come, put them in your pocket! They are two passports, under borrowed names, for you and your wife. But there is not a day to lose! Leave Paris this evening! This hour, if possible. Seats are engaged for you in the public coach from Paris to Dijon and from there to St. Claude. Farewell, let us see no more of you!

JÉRÔME

(Moved)

Carnot! *(He grips his hand.)* . . . But what is the use of flight? We should be seized at once . . . Can one escape the police-spies of the Committee or the hatred of Robespierre?

CARNOT

He knows all about it.

JÉRÔME

Who? He?

CARNOT

The Incorruptible, yes. The initiative was mine. But although he pretends to know nothing, I come with his unspoken consent.

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Your death would embarrass us, Courvoisier. The Republic takes no pleasure in loading herself down with your corpse. It is too heavy. Oblige us by taking it away. The Committee closes its eyes. But do not force us to open them. Do not let yourself be caught. You would not be pardoned. (*He goes out.*)

SCENE X

(Jérôme de Courvoisier sits at his desk, thinking. The door of Sophie's bedroom opens cautiously. Sophie appears. She looks about the empty room and at her husband, who sits with his back towards her.)

SOPHIE

(In a low voice)

They have gone?

JÉRÔME

(Without turning)

Yes.

SOPHIE

But what was Carnot saying to you?

JÉRÔME

Nothing. *(He turns around.)* Let us not waste our minutes in useless words. They are numbered. Let us consider what we have to say. Come here, Sophie. What we are going to say must not be heard by the man in there. *(He points to the door through which Vallée has gone out.)* You love that man . . . Do not answer. I know it. You are too

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sincere to have been able to hide it . . .
(*Pause.*) . . . though you are not sincere
enough to confess it. (*She makes a gesture
which he stops.*) But I do not reproach you.
If you were not able to do so it is because no
woman would have been able. Because I
know your loyalty and the weakness of the
heart, I pity you.

(*Sophie, who is standing before the seated
Jérôme, her arms hanging limply at her
sides, drops her head at these last words as
if she were crushed.*)

JÉRÔME

(*Looking at her with a sad smile*)

How you love him!

SOPHIE

(*Her head hanging*)

Forgive me.

(*A brief silence.*)

Forgive me.

JÉRÔME

You are free.

SOPHIE

(*Lifting her head and stretching out her hands
to Jérôme.*)

Jérôme! . . . Tell me . . . What am I
to do?

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JÉRÔME

It is not my place to answer. Every one is his own judge. Each answers for himself.

SOPHIE

How you despise me!

JÉRÔME

No. I neither hate nor despise anything. It is not the fault of anyone. It is the fault of life.

SOPHIE

(Her hands stretched out to him)

But you, you will suffer!

JÉRÔME

No, at my age, in these days, I haven't the time to do so. You must think only of yourself! Be happy if you can.

SOPHIE

(In despair)

Jérôme! *(She stands leaning against the mantlepiece, sobbing, her face in her hands. Jérôme, moved, rises, goes over to her, bends over her paternally.)*

SOPHIE

(Lifting her face, which is bathed in tears)

Alas, we once loved each other. Why does

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love pass? Why does love change? . . .
Forgive me! I have hurt you again . . .
My dear, I have never ceased to feel the most
reverent affection for you. Rather than
cause you the suffering of today, I would
gladly have suffered and kept silent until
death . . . But passion came like a gust of
wind and flung the doors wide. It has
seized upon me, it drags me along. What am
I to do? Tell me, what can I do? Can I resist
it? Is it possible to resist it? Is it possible?
Would it be beautiful? Would it be human?
(*Jérôme looks at her pityingly and smiles
tenderly. Then he takes from the desk the
two passports left by Carnot and gives them
to her. Sophie accepts the papers mechan-
ically and looks at them without under-
standing.*)

JÉRÔME

You will both leave this evening. These
papers will open the gates and the roads of
France to the Swiss frontier. Everything has
been provided for. The visas are in order
and the seats in the coach engaged. It will
be quite easy for you to arrange your cos-
tumes and your appearance in accordance
with the descriptions given. Go and tell

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Vallée and get ready quickly! It would never do if this night found him still here. Go! Save your life and save your happiness!

SOPHIE

(Greatly agitated)

My dear! . . . You wish? . . . You wish? . . . No, it isn't possible!

JÉRÔME

(Calmly)

You must save Vallée. Don't you wish to?

SOPHIE

(Passionately)

Yes, I wish to.

JÉRÔME

Then go with him. He will not leave alone. And you should not do so either. I entrust you to each other. Don't delay any longer. Go!

(Sophie bends before Jérôme, takes his hand and kisses it. Jérôme tries to withdraw his hand. Sophie raises herself, but without letting go of her husband's hand, and they remain standing, face to face and looking at each other affectionately.)

SOPHIE

You are good! . . . I cannot accept it.

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JÉRÔME

You can do so loyally. Between us everything is frank and open.

SOPHIE

I cannot leave you.

JÉRÔME

Your heart has left me, Sophie. Let us not try to deceive ourselves. Your heart is with him.

SOPHIE

O what misery to think that this heart . . . I gave it to you, and today I am taking it back . . . I do not wish to do so! O misery! My heart is not my own! . . . Everything escapes me, even my own self! . . . I feel crushed by the flight of time. Yesterday I was yours, I had promised to share to the end your joys and sorrows. And I am abandoning you in the middle of the road to take up what new burden of a love that is just beginning! . . . Ah, what begins again will end also! . . . Have I enough faith to make my life over? Where can I find confidence in myself and in life? . . . O misery!

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JÉRÔME

Life, which dies every night and is reborn every morning, will soon bring you forgetfulness and hope. Think of it no more! Go! *(He gently pushes Sophie towards the door of the bedroom where they have hidden Vallée. He places the passports in her hand.)*

SOPHIE

(Who has taken the passports and glanced at them mechanically, is struck with an idea.)

But how do you happen to have these passports?

JÉRÔME

What does it matter?

SOPHIE

Where did you get them?

JÉRÔME

Carnot gave them to me.

SOPHIE

Why? . . . Why did he give them to you? They were made out for you. You and me. For the two of us. So we must leave? Something threatens! You are in danger!

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JÉRÔME

(Trying to distract her thoughts)

No, no . . . No danger . . .

SOPHIE

If there were none, why should he come and bring you the means for us to escape?

JÉRÔME

Come, don't be foolish. Don't go and invent anxieties. There are plenty of real ones. Think only of saving the man you love!

SOPHIE

The man I love? Courvoisier, I bear your name. I am still your wife. Until the bond between us is broken, I maintain my right, my right as a wife, and the law of absolute truth we have always observed between us . . . You owe it to me. Speak, without hiding anything!

JÉRÔME

(Yielding, after a brief silence)

We have been denounced. Bayot has betrayed us. They know whom we are hiding. They will come tonight to arrest Vallée.

SOPHIE

And you?

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JÉRÔME

The friendship of Carnot will protect me. Enough of talking! Get ready to leave. Dress warmly. Collect the things you need most. I am going to find Vallée.

(He is about to open the door when Vallée appears, his air baggard, his clothes in disorder.)

SCENE XI

VALLÉE

(Throwing an anxious glance about him)
They are no longer here?

JÉRÔME

No, but they are coming back.

VALLÉE

(Anxiously)

When?

JÉRÔME

I don't know.

VALLÉE

(Hurrying across the room with great, uneasy strides, looking out of the window, listening at the door, constantly in motion.)

Where can I fly? Where can I find a shelter?

JÉRÔME

Vallée, I wish to speak to you.

VALLÉE

(Continuing to move about, without listening)
I will not go back into that hole where

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you shut me up. I can't endure that motionless position! There I was, stretched out, locked in, as if I were in my coffin. And I heard them walking round the room. They struck the wall against which I lay, suffocated, unable to make a movement to defend myself . . . I cannot endure it! I will not go back.

JÉRÔME

(Who has sat down, calmly)

You are not going back. Listen to what I have to say to you.

VALLÉE

(Uneasily)

They are coming here again, you say?

JÉRÔME

(Calmly)

We have time to talk. *(He signals to him to sit down. Vallée does so, but even as he follows Courvoisier's words he is anxiously attentive to the noises outside.)*

JÉRÔME

I have prevailed upon my wife to leave Paris for some time. Her health has been ruined since last winter. She is going to spend two months in her old country, by the

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Soane, near Cluny. I should accompany her but that public affairs do not permit it . . .

(Vallée has risen from his chair and is listening to steps that are mounting the stairs.)

VALLÉE

(In a strangled voice)

They are coming . . .

(A moment of silence. Jérôme does not seem to hear. Sophie listens without moving, seated before the fireplace, where she has just stirred up a little fire of wood. Vallée crouches, ready to spring upon any one who enters.)

SOPHIE

(Calmly)

They are going to the floor above.

(Vallée sits down again.)

JÉRÔME

(Going on as if he had not been interrupted)

I cannot accompany her. Here is my passport. You are going in my place.

VALLÉE

(Astounded)

II

JÉRÔME

So in watching over her you will escape from the meshes of the net that has been

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spread to catch you. Once she has reached home, in Cluny, you will be near the frontier. The rest is your affair.

(Vallée, who has risen, takes the passport Courvoisier holds out to him, folds and unfolds it, too astonished to speak. Meanwhile, Sophie, listening, reflecting, watching both men, noiselessly tears up her passport and throws it into the fire. She rises and goes to Vallée.)

SOPHIE

(To Jérôme, who motions to her to be silent)

No, my friend, let me speak. We must no longer conceal anything. *(To Vallée, with gentle firmness.)* Claude, my husband knows our feelings. I have confessed them to him. He is generous enough to leave me free to follow you. My decision is made. Free, I shall remain with my husband. I gave myself to him, freely, for good and all. He has never fallen from my affection. I cannot take it away from him again without falling myself. A proud soul does not forswear itself. I wished to share the ordeal of his life. What I once wished I still wish. *(She goes to her husband and gives him her hand.)*

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JÉRÔME

(Greatly moved)

I no longer have the right to hold you. I shall drag you down in my ruin.

SOPHIE

(Quick and low)

Be silent. He must not know!

VALLÉE

(Bitterly)

Ah, you have never loved me!

SOPHIE

I love you, Vallée. I shall always love you. But if we cannot help suffering from love we can help being its playthings.

VALLÉE

(Bitterly)

You have never loved. You love nothing but your own pride.

SOPHIE

(Softly)

My friend, if I did not have this pride, as you call it, this poor, wounded pride, would you love me so much? Would you love me very long, weak, erring, given over to a passion that always passes, faithless to my faith? And should we be happy? We

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should be afraid of a happiness that comes to an end, a love that fades. And, abandoned by love, we should find ourselves alone and dishonored.

VALLÉE

(Violently)

What would it matter? I should have had you?

SOPHIE

(With a sad smile)

And you would have destroyed me . . . Come, you must save yourself, my poor bird of prey! Just now you are a prey for others. Let us talk no more. Let us think of a way of escaping.

VALLÉE

I do not wish to escape. Not without you.

SOPHIE

I have burned my passport. It is no longer possible for me to go.

VALLÉE

At least, not tonight. I wish to spend this night under your roof.

JÉRÔME

They know I am sheltering you. Before midnight you will be arrested.

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VALLÉE

No! You are deceiving me! You lie!

JÉRÔME

You shall have the proof. They may be here at any moment.

VALLÉE

It's false! . . . (*He listens.*) I hear them! . . . No . . . I shall not go. I shall stay.

JÉRÔME

(*Calmly*)

Stay, then! You are ready to die?

VALLÉE

(*Shuddering*)

Die! . . . No! No! . . . I don't want to die . . . Die! Horrors! . . .

JÉRÔME

(*Calmly*)

Arrested in an hour, sentenced tomorrow morning, guillotined in the evening . . .

VALLÉE

(*Beside himself*)

Tomorrow evening, at this hour, a heap of flesh, flung into a cart and tossed out at the charnel-house . . . I! Never! . . . I won't

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have it! Save me! (*He sinks down bewildered at the foot of an empty armchair, his hands gripping the back.*)

JÉRÔME

Then prepare to fly.

(*He has risen and with his wife is collecting a few objects, clothes, food, to make up a parcel for Vallée's journey. Vallée rises slowly, breathing heavily, his head hanging. He does not dare to look at his friends who are coming and going in the room. He turns his back on them and stands leaning against the chair, with his face towards the audience.*)

VALLÉE

I am ashamed.

SOPHIE

(*Going up to him and throwing a cloak over his shoulders.*)

We shall save you, my friend!

VALLÉE

I am ashamed.

SOPHIE

(*Wrapping him up tenderly*)

No, don't be ashamed. I am glad you want to live. It makes me happy that life is still dear to you.

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VALLÉE

I hate it and I want it. I cannot, cannot resign myself to losing it. Great God! What has happened? The humiliation is crushing me . . . Sophie, to rejoin you I braved a thousand deaths. I never trembled except with the fear of not seeing you again. And now, and now! I can no longer endure the thought of death . . . No, don't look at me with your pitying eyes! What disgust I must inspire in you!

SOPHIE

(In a low voice)

Dear friend, never have I loved you more!

VALLÉE

Ah, it is seeing you again that has taken away my strength. It is because I have once more learned the value of the life that I had renounced. I can no longer bear to leave it. *(He is overwhelmed.)* I am a coward. I am afraid.

JÉRÔME

(Approaching him affectionately)

Don't torment yourself! Don't accuse yourself of weakness! We know, my friend,

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that no man is braver than you. But the bravest is still a man. You have strained your strength to the breaking-point. For five months you have kept up a superhuman struggle. Fatigue has suddenly dropped down upon you like a rock. You have touched earth. But it was in fighting. Withdraw from the arena. You can do so with your head still high. You must. Quit Paris! Leave France! Escape from your enemies! Go and recover your strength for new battles!

VALLÉE

(Somewhat comforted at these words, rising and preparing to leave)

But you will join me later?

JÉRÔME

(Good-naturedly)

I am not immortal.

VALLÉE

But you, Sophie . . . In that case? . . . Some day perhaps? . . . *(He stops abruptly and flings a furtive glance at Courvoisier, bends over to give Sophie's hand a long kiss,*

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starts towards the door. As he is about to go out, he turns, sees that Courvoisier is offering him his hand, hesitated a second, grasps his hand and turns a last look upon Sophie.)

Farewell! (He goes out.)

SCENE XII

(Jérôme de Courvoisier and Sophie remain alone. Night has set in. Jérôme is still looking at the door through which Vallée has gone out. Sophie goes up to the window and looks through the curtains.)

JÉRÔME

(Good-naturedly)

I believe the poor boy has just been calculating the brevity of my days. *(He goes up to the fireplace and lights a candle.)*

SOPHIE

(Leaving her post of observation and coming to the fireplace, with an affectionate and melancholy irony.)

But he has not taken into account the length of mine. *(She turns to her husband and stretches out her hands to him. He takes them and looks at her tenderly.)*

JÉRÔME

You regret nothing?

SOPHIE

Is our arrest sure?

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JÉRÔME

There is no chance of escape.

SOPHIE

Then all is well. (*She withdraws her hands and they both sit down by the dying fire.*)

JÉRÔME

Our last evening.

SOPHIE

I feel relieved. No more decisions to make. No more struggles. No need to exert one's will. Nothing but to abandon ourselves to forces that decide for us, to the stream of night.

(*Jérôme has moved close to her and looks at her with deep affection. She lays her head on the shoulder of her husband, seated beside her. Their knees touch, their hands lie motionless on their knees; they dream and smile, looking into the fire. Almost all of the following dialogue is uttered in low voices.*)

SOPHIE

(*Tenderly and calmly*)

My good and dear husband, sacrificing yourself for me so simply!

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JÉRÔME

It is no sacrifice to desire the happiness of those we love.

SOPHIE

I am happy now.

JÉRÔME

You wish to console me.

SOPHIE

(Calmly and slowly, but the last words with a bitter shudder.)

No, my friend, I speak truly. I have left my sorrows on that other shore that lies behind us now. Ah, what a relief to see them disappear, with my head on your shoulder! . . . Stay as you are! Don't move! . . . And that human hell with its passions, its follies and its fears!

JÉRÔME

He was not yet tired of it, our Vallée.
(Both smile faintly.)

SOPHIE

Poor boy! . . . Yes, how eager he was to plunge back into it! . . . Do you think he will escape?

JÉRÔME

I hope so.

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SOPHIE

What happiness! . . . But I dread his grief when he learns our fate.

JÉRÔME

Life will be stronger.

SOPHIE

Yes, I suppose so . . . Poor Vallée!

JÉRÔME

Do you remember, Sophie, our long evenings here in this room? Sitting by the table and reading, you would watch me work, I would watch you dream. Both of us dreamed. For everything, thought, work, knowledge, love — everything is a dream. Each in turn would offer the other his dreams; and often, in my difficulties, I had recourse to your quiet mind, my good counsellor . . .

SOPHIE

I remember everything, from the first evening when I came as a young woman into this old house. We had just been married; and, although you were already surrounded with glory, you were afraid of me because I was young and you were so no longer. Then — we were alone — you came up to

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me and said in a low voice, "Forgive me for loving you!"

JÉRÔME

Have you forgiven me?

SOPHIE

My heart was filled with gratitude that has just come back to me this evening, this last evening. You yourself must forgive me for having forgotten it! (*She offers her forehead to Jérôme, who kisses it.*)

JÉRÔME

I too, my Sophie, forgot. I forgot my duty of courage and sincerity. In what a state of weakness I still was when I returned this evening! And it was the feeling that I had lost you that gave me strength to make my decisions.

SOPHIE

We were both lost in this labyrinth of a tormented world . . . Blest be this final hour that has allowed us to find each other again and to find ourselves!

JÉRÔME

Nunc dimittis . . . All is well with us . . . Listen! In the deserted street, footsteps coming this way . . .

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SOPHIE

(With awakening anguish)

But all our great plans, all our frustrated hopes, all our ruined work, everything that dies with us . . .

JÉRÔME

(Listening)

They are coming up the steps . . .

SOPHIE

If at least we were leaving a child behind us! . . . Why, why was life ever given us?

JÉRÔME

For us to conquer it.

(A silence. They have risen. Sophie, leaning against Jérôme, looks at him and smiles in resignation. They stand, one in front of the other, and do not separate again. Sophie's head is on Jérôme's shoulder. They do not even observe the door when it opens. Approaching voices are heard.)

SOPHIE

(With a melancholy smile)

To conquer . . . Farewell, my friend.
"The laurels all are cut."
(A rough knocking at the door.)

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JÉRÔME

(Very tenderly)

"The high wild woods of laurel . . ."

SOPHIE

(Pointing to a branch of lilac that has lain on the table since the opening scene.)

No, give me instead that fading cluster of young blossoms, those lilacs . . . *(Courvoisier gives her the flowering branch. She kisses it. The door opens . . . A band of armed men.)*

THE END

